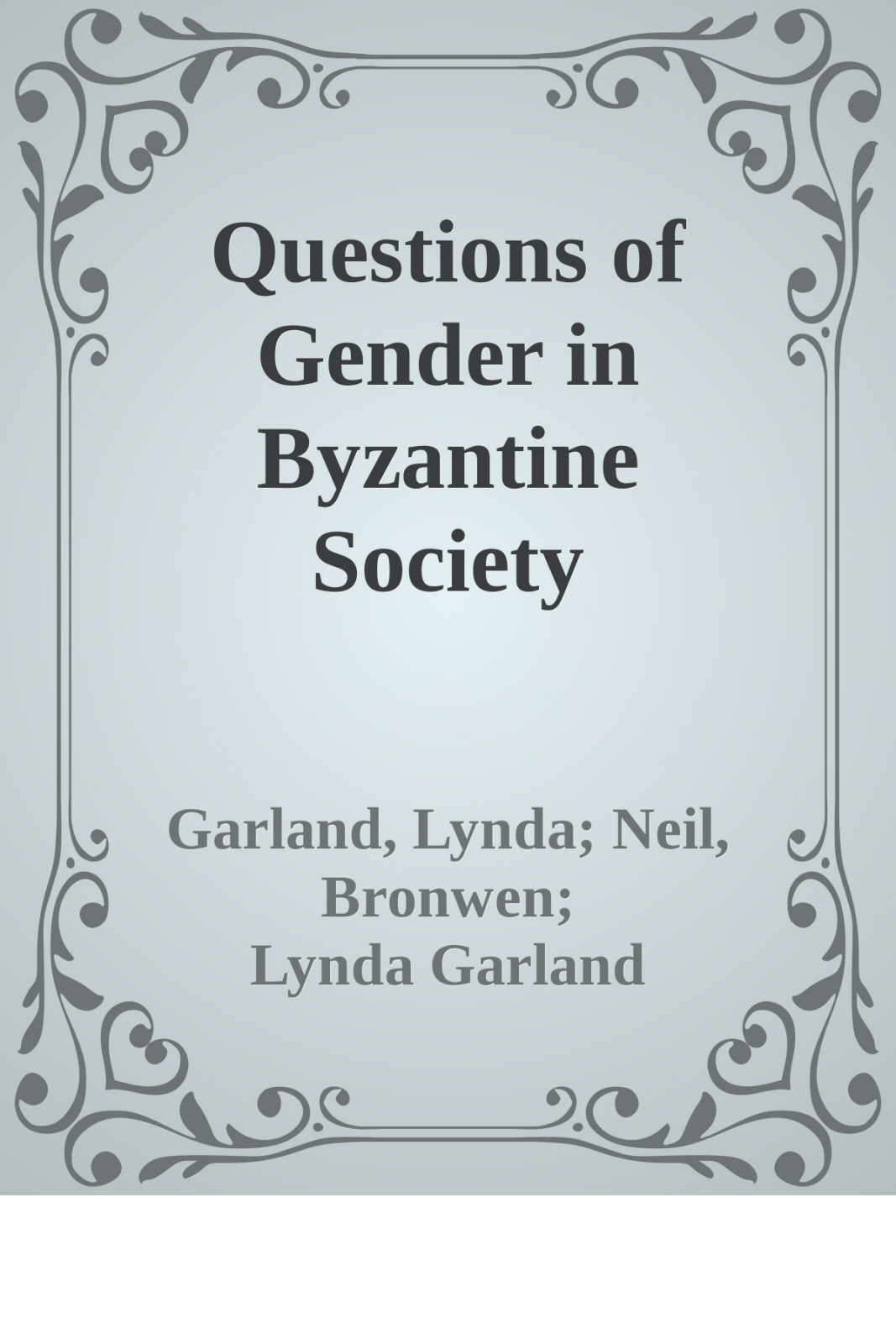


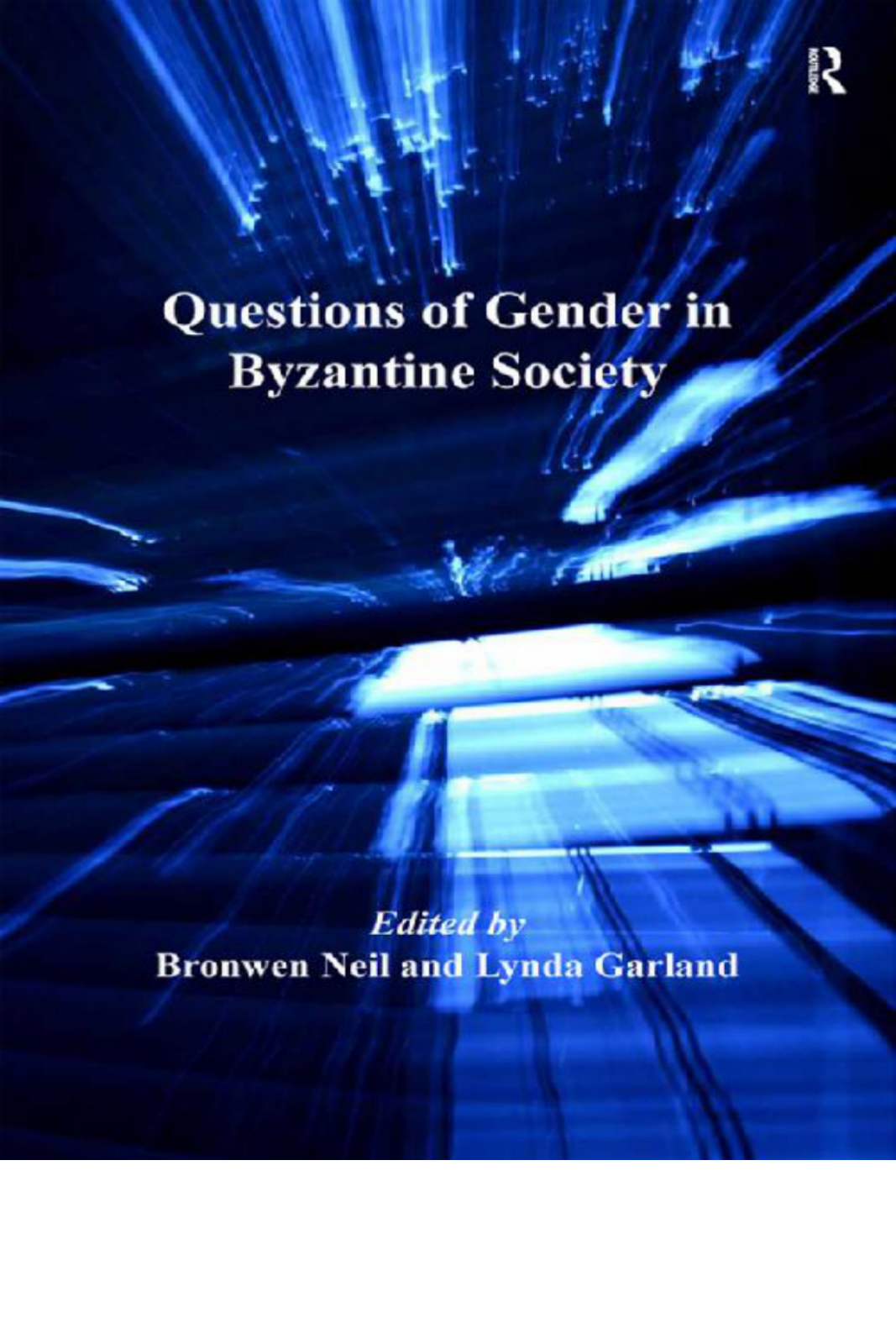
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Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society

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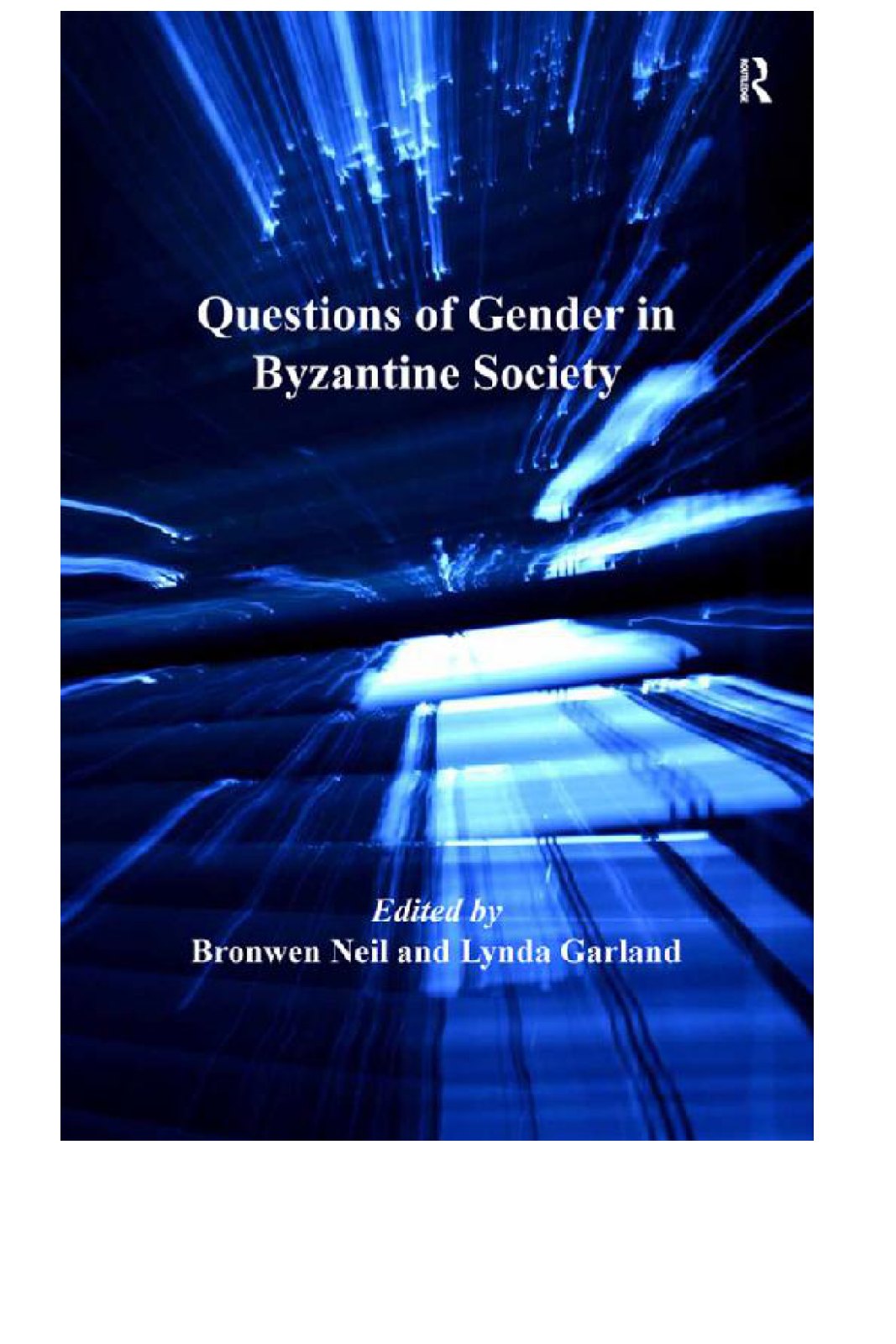
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Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society

Edited by
Bronwen Neil and Lynda Garland

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Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society

Edited by
Bronwen Neil and Lynda Garland

QUESTIONS OF GENDER IN BYZANTINE SOCIETY

For John Melville-Jones

Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society

Edited by

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Contributors

Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

1 An Introduction to Questions of Gender in Byzantium

Bronwen Neil

2 Perceptions of Byzantine Virtus in Southern Italy, from the Eighth to Eleventh Centuries

Paul Brown

3 ‘Till Death Do Us Part?': Family Life in Byzantine Monasteries

Lynda Garland

4 Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in the Byzantine Empire

Amelia R. Brown

5 Changing Conceptions of Mary in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist

Sarah Gador-Whyte

6 Ghosts in the Machine: The Lives and Deaths of Constantinian Imperial Women

Liz James

7 Regarding Women on the Throne: Representations of Empress Eirene

Bronwen Neil

8 The Brides of 1420: Men Looking at Women's Bodies

Diana Gilliland Wright

9 Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course

Shaun Tougher

10 The Spiritual Valency of Gender in Byzantine Society

Damien Casey

Bibliography

Index

List of Figures

6.1 Family tree of Diocletian, Galerius and Maximinus Daza

6.2 Family tree of Maximian and Constantius

6.3 Family tree of Constantine

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all those who have contributed to this volume, and to those who presented papers at the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies conference which inspired its conception. My co-editor Lynda Garland, as host of that conference on the theme of 'Gender and Class in Byzantine Society' at the University of New England in April 2010, has played a most important part in bringing together the papers submitted here. Special thanks to Sarah Gador-Whyte and Dinah Joesoef for careful proofing and editorial work, and to Pauline Allen, Roger Scott and Andrew Stephenson for their valuable advice along the way. All chapters have been peer-reviewed. To our anonymous referees, I am particularly grateful.

It is a pleasure to dedicate this volume to Professor John Melville-Jones, who, as Winthrop Professor of Classics and Ancient History at the University of Western Australia, Perth, has done so much for Byzantine studies in Australia and beyond.

Bronwen Neil
24 October 2012

List of Abbreviations

CFHB Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae

CSHB Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae

CL Classical Library

MGH Monumenta Germaniae Historica

PG *Patrologiae cursus completus series graeca*, (ed.) Jean-Paul Migne (161 vols, Paris: Imprimerie catholique, 1857–66)

PL *Patrologiae cursus completus series latina*, (ed.) Jean-Paul Migne (221 vols, Paris: Imprimerie catholique, 1844–64)

ALRM M. Jones, J.R. Martindale and J. Morris (eds), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: Vol. 1, AD 260–395* (Cambridge, 1971)

S Scriptores in folio

SRG Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum

SRG in usum scholarum Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum

SRG et Italicarum Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum et Italicarum

SRG nova series Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum nova series

TT Translated Texts for Historians

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Questions of Gender in Byzantium

Bronwen Neil

Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society applies the lens of gender to the study of Byzantine history, from the fourth to fifteenth centuries. Drawing on a wide range of literary evidence, this collection of essays brings together the findings of nine established and emerging scholars in the field. It is unique in drawing equally upon Greek and Latin sources for the period in question, thus bridging the traditional divide between eastern Byzantium and its western territories. Secular and religious sources are studied in tandem in order to produce a fuller picture of how the social indicators of gender functioned in Byzantine society.

Although gender was a key social indicator in Byzantine society, as in all others, Byzantine studies runs a poor second to western medieval studies when it comes to gender studies, although the imbalance has begun to be redressed by the publication of James (1997).¹ The array of secondary literature of women's studies in Byzantium is vast; that on gender studies is only beginning to catch up.² Much of the previous work in this area has focused on imperial women or other women of the upper classes,³ as well as female saints, especially the most holy woman of all, Mary the mother of Jesus.⁴ A welcome exception is found in some of the essays presented in Garland (2006), which emphasise the important economic role played by women of various backgrounds in the Middle Byzantine period.⁵ The pioneering work of Angeliki Laiou in the area of economics and gender is particularly notable.⁶ The collected essays edited by Lebecq et al. (1999),⁷ and Brubaker and Smith (2004),⁸ bring together for the first time discussions of gender in the western and eastern Roman empires, and cover both Christian and Islamic territories.

The current volume shows that masculine and feminine roles were not always clearly defined in Byzantium, allowing for 'slippage' between the traditional roles of men and women, girls and boys. Eunuchs arguably constituted a 'third gender' or no gender at all. External markers such as facial hair and clothing played a crucial role in marking masculinity or its lack.⁹ Gender roles were also defined to

some extent by social status, which was in a state of flux from the fourth to fifteenth centuries, as much linked to patronage networks as to wealth, as the empire came under a series of external and internal pressures. This fluidity applied equally in ecclesiastical and secular spheres. The present collection of essays uncovers gender roles in the imperial family, in monastic institutions of both genders, in the Orthodox church, and in the nascent cult of Mary in the east. It puts the spotlight on flashpoints over a millennium of Byzantine rule, from Constantine the Great to the Palaiologoi, and covers a wide geographical range, from Byzantine Italy to Syria. A shortcoming imposed by the sources is our focus on women, men, and eunuchs of the upper classes, although the experience of slaves in monasteries and prostitutes is touched upon. Another obvious *lacuna* is imperial legislation on gender-related issues such as marriage law,¹⁰ although this is compensated to some extent by the focus on canon law in various chapters.¹¹ Our focus is not on the material realities of gendered lives in Byzantine society but on the ideational power of gender to shape those lives. Our chapters cover various social contexts as represented in elite literary texts, such as the imperial court, women's and men's monasteries, ascetic withdrawal and war.

Methodological Issues

First we must start with a definition of gender, for which I turn to Liz James: 'As a tool for research, gender refers to the differences between men and women in terms of the differences created by societies rather than the biological differences of sex.'¹² Each society will construct different gender rules for men and women slightly differently. What makes Byzantine society so interesting is that it recognised not just two but three genders: women, men and eunuchs, the last category being reserved for physically or spiritually 'neutered' beings.¹³

One reason for Byzantinists lagging behind medievalists in the area of gender studies is the relative lack of evidence from outside the capital, Constantinople, before the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This lack applies especially to written sources, such as histories, chronicles, monastic foundation documents, hagiography and epigraphic evidence. Fortunately we have extant sources: coins, other visual sources (e.g. mosaics, tapestries and *freschi*), and archaeological records. Byzantine Italy is a happy exception in the amount and diversity of its surviving evidence, which includes documentary and narrative sources, as well as archaeological and art-historical material. The relative wealth of Italian Byzantine sources is put to good use in the chapters of Liz James, Shaun Tougher and Paul

Brown.

Methodological problems are rife in the study of gender as it impacted on Byzantine society. As Suzanne Dixon pointed out in her seminal work on maternal roles and their representation in ancient Roman sources, much of our material is idealising and prescriptive.¹⁴ Women were praised for excellence in the traditional virtues of 'patience, silence, modesty, beauty and fertility'.¹⁵ This list perhaps says more about the men who praised such virtues than the women who were supposed to embody them. From the Middle Byzantine period, 'discretion' became another point of praise, as women were given less latitude for sexual deviancy than formerly in Late Antiquity.¹⁶ Generally only the elite classes register in our sources. As Garland notes, women from non-elite backgrounds enter our sources 'only when they are prominent at court or acquire wealth and influence'.¹⁷ Another, gender-related, problem with both written and visual sources is that they were almost always commissioned and produced by men, and thus they represent a male viewpoint. This is a particular problem when they are being interrogated for details of women's lives and histories. James comments:¹⁸

[T]he sources, both written and visual, also highlight many of the problems in understanding women's lives in this period. What we know of these women is dictated largely by what the written sources choose to tell us, and authors treat women primarily as vehicles in order to make political or religious points and especially to highlight the worth of the men around them.

This is particularly true of hagiographical sources, such as the *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, whose dealings with rural women in his own family and outside it are treated in Carolyn Connor's *Women of Byzantium*.¹⁹ Connor has made studies of individual women across the whole Byzantine period,²⁰ studies which exemplify James' point that most work on gender relations must deal first with individual histories, from which contemporary historians may attempt to extract 'patterns of life' by placing individual women in their socioeconomic contexts.²¹

Even imperial women are usually only mentioned by virtue of their relationships with men; Helena and Irene are exceptions to the rule. Marriages, births and deaths all are matters of dynastic significance. James' essay on the Constantinian women Prisca, Valeria and Fausta, reveals that the use of visual sources to search for these women as individuals is ineffective. Instead, we should interrogate the sources for women as signs and stories, or ciphers commenting on the men around them. The same applies to the brides of 1420: Sophia of Montferrat for John VIII, and Cleofe Malatesta, the bride of

Theodoros, despot of Mistra. This does not, however, apply to the female monastics who are the subjects of the *typika*, as who have a strong authorial voice, as Garland demonstrates.²² Female authors are rare, with a few notable exceptions, such as Anna Komnene and Kassia the hymnographer.²³

Many of the essays in this collection (Casey, A. Brown, Neil, Garland, Gador-Whyte), adopt the twin lenses of gender and religion to study various moments of Byzantine society. This is partly due to an imbalance in the sources towards ecclesiastical and monastic authorship and subjects. It is also due to the permeating influence of religion on Byzantine society, and the many ways in which Christianity shaped understandings of sex and gender, while also promoting an ideology of gender transcendence.²⁴ The five essays edited by Bitel and Lifshitz (2008) concern gender in medieval Christianity. Thus their focus is on medieval monastics and clerics, who constituted a ‘third gender’, according to some modern medievalists.²⁵ In her introductory essay, Lisa Bitel identifies some of the challenges for articulating a twin methodology for the history of religion and gender, observing that:²⁶

Just as sexual politics have channeled historians’ understanding of gender in the medieval past, so the secularization of Western academe over the past two hundred years and the resulting tension between religious and non-religious interpretations of history have prevented historians from appreciating just how profoundly Christianity penetrated the lives of pre-modern Europeans.

This is equally true of eastern Orthodox Christianity and western Catholicism.

The concept of gender goes further than ‘male’ and ‘female’ biological sex, and invites us to see masculinity and femininity as social constructions.²⁷ The sexual indeterminacy of eunuchs, often induced artificially to qualify boys as potential court officials, presents yet another facet of gender relations specific (but not unique) to Byzantium. While contemporary thinking on the question of sex and gender sees biological sex as a given, albeit one that can be surgically changed, gender slides on a spectrum that does not correlate with biological sex. The Byzantine fathers would have agreed that gender and sex need not correlate, but for them it was a matter of sublimating sexuality altogether in order to attain ‘perfect’ male gender.²⁸

The most interesting comparison to be made between contemporary gender studies and the sources of our period lies in the difference between their respective approaches to the sex/gender distinction. Whereas bodies could change because they belonged to the transient realm of ‘becoming’, gender as the social meaning

attributed to the body was eternal, according to Byzantine thinkers. As Damien Casey puts it: 'To change one's status one had to transform one's body, usually through ascetic practices. Equality in late antiquity was a thoroughly androcentric concept that in effect required a renunciation of feminine specificity.'²⁹ One of the best examples of the sliding scale of gender is found in the sayings of the monks and nuns who inhabited the Egyptian desert. These sayings have been preserved by unknown sources, in several collections, including the *Apophthegmata*, preserved in Greek, Coptic, Syriac and later in Latin. They include the sayings of monks and nuns from St Anthony in the late third century to Abba Phocas in the sixth.³⁰ The sayings attributed to the desert mothers were not necessarily ever uttered by historical women, but their inclusion in improving monastic literature tells us much about how Byzantine men and women regarded the relationship between gender and spiritual authority.

As the inferior sex, women were seen as more subject to the weaknesses of the flesh than were men. Thus the Egyptian desert mothers who triumphed over their inferior physical status in the solitary ascetic life could be seen as greater athletes than the men who achieved the same goal with fewer handicaps. The harsh conditions of desert life included lack of regular food and water, and exposure to predations of wild beasts and to the elements, which together caused most of their outward female characteristics to fall away. Menstrual cycles often ceased; women's breasts shrivelled; their hair fell out or was shaved off. In one astonishing example, Abba Bessarion and an old man came upon a brother in a cave, who was engaged in plaiting a rope. The brother ignored their presence and continued with his task. On their return journey they looked for him again and found him dead in the cave. They took the body to bury it and discovered that the 'brother' was a woman. 'Filled with astonishment, the old man said, "See how the women triumph over Satan, while we still behave badly in the towns."³¹

The lives of ordinary women who were reduced out of penury to a life of prostitution are usually related as cautionary tales of falling victim to Satan, or the demon of fornication. A particularly moving case was that of the orphan Paësia, who converted her deceased parents' house into a hospice for monks in Scetis. She served the fathers for a long time with her hospitality. But eventually her resources ran out, and she began to live an evil life, to the point of becoming a prostitute to earn the money to survive and maintain her hostel for monks. Finally, through the intervention of John the Dwarf, who saw that it was her turn to be shown charity, she was persuaded to leave her life of sin and enter the desert life. On her way into the desert with Abba John, she died, and he saw angels of God bearing

away her soul, and he heard a voice proclaim: ‘One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penitence of many who persevere without showing such fervour in repentance.’ Thus Paësia was a symbol of God’s readiness to forgive the penitent sinner.³² We look in vain for any sign of contrition from the monks who had virtually eaten her out of house and home.

Such female ascetics as Paësia and the unnamed ‘brother’ could be considered equal in spiritual terms to men, even excelling them in spiritual warfare, but at the cost of sacrificing their biological distinctiveness. The notion of ‘superior’ masculine gender was attached to the physicality of a masculine body. This conceptual framework, so different from our own, impacted in interesting ways on those of ‘inferior’ gender – women and eunuchs – as we shall see in the essays presented herein.

Contents

Key themes of the essays within include attitudes towards gender and sexual stereotypes, including misogyny, women’s education and property rights, and evidence for general power and influence exercised by women. These themes are examined across the breadth of the Byzantine empire, from its capital Constantinople to the shipping hub of Venice, from the province of western Syria in the East to those parts of Italy that remained under Byzantine control from 540 to 1071 AD. The chronological frame spans from wives of the Flavians to the imperial brides of 1420.

In the next chapter, Byzantine Italy emerges as the site of a major clash of cultures – Roman, Greek, Lombard and Norman – producing interesting permutations in the interpretation of gender, especially in the military, and bringing a new flexibility to traditional roles for women. Paul Brown examines the image of ‘effeminate’ Byzantine males, a commonplace of Latin chronicles of the crusades from the twelfth century onwards. Based on often unselective use of southern Italian works written by Lombards and Normans in the eleventh century, it is widely held by scholars that this perception was also common in the *Mezzogiorno*. Yet this chapter emphasises the reverse side of the *muliebris* coin in tenth- and eleventh-century sources. Those scholars who argue in favour of the ‘effeminate’ perception tend also to argue that it was simply a reiteration of an age-old stereotyping an assessment of representations of the Byzantines in Latin historical writing from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Paul Brown demonstrates that, although a stereotype did exist, it characterised male Byzantines as ‘treacherous’ or ‘cunning’, rather than effeminate.

The church was a major locus for changing social roles of both men and women, both lay and monastic. Sarah Gador-Whyte examines changing images of the mother of Christ in texts and liturgical hymns of the sixth and seventh centuries for clues to changing women's roles in the early Byzantine period. Mary played a number of roles in the *kontakia* of the sixth-century hymn-writer Romanos the Melode. She is the second Eve, who redeems all womankind; the caring and gentle mother; intercessor; humble virgin, and the God-bearer (*Theotokos*). Gador-Whyte investigates the various ways Romanos presents the Virgin Mary and how these different representations reflect changes in ideas about Mary in the sixth century among 'ordinary people'.

Byzantine lives conducted in religious institutions, including those of families in male and female monasteries, are discussed by Lynda Garland. Garland considers Byzantine families in the context of monastic life and analyses the ways in which Byzantine families remained united even when their members entered monastic institutions. She discusses the existence and role of double monasteries and those that were deliberately established to be institutions to house family members of either sex. As well as utilising hagiographical texts, Garland makes particular use of *typika*, monastic foundation documents, and discusses to what extent these can be used as evidence for studying the Byzantine family and its interests. She also considers the expectations of family members on joining such institutions and the ways in which family concerns prevailed within them, with particular regard to the multigenerational women who became nuns in the female establishments of the Theotokos Kecharitomene, Constantine Lips, Anagyroi, Philanthropos Soter and Bebaia Elpis.

Chapters by Liz James, Bronwen Neil, and Diana Gilliland Wright consider the roles of female members of the Byzantine court from the fourth to fifteenth centuries. The practice of dynastic marriage and arranging marriages for political advantage had always been part of the policy of Roman emperors, but with the Flavians, James argues, this was taken to a higher level. James demonstrates how the complicated political circumstances of the tetrarchy in the Constantinian period gave rise to an equally complex picture of imperial women, as wives or partners were put away, and new alliances forged through matrimony. Understanding the patterns is often handicapped by the lack of personal information concerning many of these women, even down to the detail of their names. James presents the genealogies of several imperial women, which highlight how women were used to cement political alliances and to bind men to each other. As a result of this, Constantinian women were also discarded or reused when political alliances changed or developed unexpectedly.

Neil examines the various representations of Empress Eirene in a range of sources, including Frankish chronicles, papal letters, Byzantine histories, coins and imperial records, looking for evidence of gender stereotyping that has passed down, seemingly unquestioned, into contemporary scholarship. Irene, wife of Emperor Leo IV and mother of Constantine VI, imperial regent (780–97) and later sole ruler on the Byzantine throne (797–802), defender of icons and Byzantine saint, is a complex and enigmatic figure. It has become a commonplace that the West used the fact of Irene's gender to claim that the Byzantine throne was vacant. This supposition is sometimes claimed to be the reasoning behind Pope Leo III's readiness to crown the Carolingian emperor 'Emperor of the Romans' on 25 December 800. Neil focuses on the question of whether Irene was regarded as a 'real' emperor, in Roman, Frankish, and Byzantine sources. Finally, she asks what we can know of how Irene regarded herself when she was sole ruler between 797 and 802.

Gilliland Wright considers how the literary sources have shaped perceptions of two imperial brides, shipped out of Venice in 1420 to marry sons of Manuel II Palaiologos: Sophia of Montferrat and Cleofe Malatesta. Both were related to Pope Martin V who had chosen them for the marriage gambit which was to contribute to church union. Sophia left Constantinople and returned to Italy after six years, perhaps with assistance from the palace. Very nearly the only sources for this story are by Doukas and Chalcocondyles who have somewhat different versions. An evaluation of the English translation of Doukas' version reveals strong prejudices on the part of Doukas and his translator. Cleofe fared somewhat better than Sofia, falling pregnant after six years of being ignored by her husband Theodoros, who had taken a fixed-term vow of chastity. Her death in a second childbirth four years later stimulated an unparalleled outpouring of tributes from Mistra intellectuals and, most movingly, from her husband, who called her his 'fellow poet'. Chalcocondyles' report calls attention to her role as spiritual intercessor for her husband.

Amelia Brown assesses the evidence for literacy among Byzantine female elites, from abbesses to empresses, over a chronological span of 11 centuries. Byzantine women of the fourth to fifteenth centuries learned to read and write at home, at school, in convents and by their own impetus. They wrote surviving works in vernacular Greek with spelling errors, or Classicising prose and poetry equal to that of their male contemporaries. While there were always fewer literate women than men, as the urban upper-class in any given century grew, so seemingly did the number of literate women. The twelfth-century royal princess Anna Comnena had a similar education to the fourth-century Alexandrian philosopher Hypatia, while a seventh-century

abbess like Sergia studied and wrote within a Christian literary framework. Many literate women ended their lives in convents, sometimes unwillingly; almost all women who wrote knew Christian scripture thoroughly, especially the Psalms. However, from the fourth century onwards, education in Byzantine schools always combined the Greek Classics with Christian texts. Although demonstrably literate women are concentrated among the urban upper-class and nuns, they occur in large enough numbers and a wide enough distribution in our sources to ensure that some women were literate in every era of Byzantine history: reading, writing and often educating their own children as well.

Shaun Tougher, best known for his studies of eunuchs in the Byzantine court, considers how the beard was used as a social symbol and gender marker over the life course of Byzantine males. The adoption of the beard as a vital signifier of adult men marked a key transformation from the late Roman to the Byzantine world, though the importance of the growth of facial hair for the life course of males in the classical period had been recognised (i.e. the place of the dedication of hair in ritual). The embracing of beards in Byzantium, however, has been little discussed, despite its centrality in Byzantine culture. Tougher explores when and why this development occurred. He also considers what impact it had on the understanding of the male life course in Byzantium, particularly in relation to eunuchs, who could not grow beards. Were they indeed Byzantium's third gender?

The final chapter analyses the spiritual value of gender in Byzantine society. Damien Casey studies the nexus between gender and spiritual authority in Byzantine theological tracts, martyr acts and saints' *Lives*, to illustrate the ambivalence that characterised Byzantine attitudes to sex and gender. The Byzantine synthesis of spiritual and material values rested on sacrificial logic of the Eucharist and the doctrine of divinisation, according to which every individual was seen as gradually becoming divine. Eunuchs came to have a unique spiritual valency owing to their having escaped the traditional bonds of gender.

Together these essays portray a surprising range of male and female experience in various Byzantine social institutions – whether religious, military or imperial court – over the course of more than a millennium. Common themes that bind the collected essays into a coherent whole include specifically Byzantine expectations of gender among the social elite; the changing religious roles of women, and the fluidity of social and sexual identities for Byzantine men and women within the church; and the specific challenges that strong individuals posed to the traditional limitations of gender within a hierarchical society dominated by Christian orthodoxy. The collection will offer a

provocative contrast to recent studies based on western medieval scholarship.

Spelling conventions follow the place of origin of the text. Both Greek and Latin names are kept in their original spellings, sometimes with both occurring when the name is cited in eastern and western sources: e.g. Nikeforos and Nicephorus.

¹ L. James (ed.), *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium* (London; New York, 1997). Its essays are focused on material similar to that of the current volume, but with more emphasis on the role of eunuchs. Essays from two of its contributors, Liz James and Shaun Tougher, are included *infra*.

² The *Dumbarton Oaks Bibliography on Women in Byzantium*, (ed.) A.-M. Talbot, accessible online at: (http://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/women_in_byzantium.html) (accessed 18.1.12) is currently being expanded to become a *Bibliography on Gender in Byzantium*.

³ J. Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London, 2001; repr. Princeton, 2004), focuses on Irene, Euphrosyne and Theodora II; Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London; New York, 1999).

⁴ See especially the work of A.-M. Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996), a translation of ten *Lives* from the tenth to thirteenth centuries; and on the cult of the *Theotokos*, see esp. S.J. Shoemaker, 'The Cult of Fashion: The Earliest Life of the Virgin and Constantinople's Marian Relics', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 62 (2008): pp. 53–74; and a new collection of 12 essays, L.M. Peltomaa, P. Allen and A. Külzer (eds), *Presbeia Theotokou* (Vienna, forthcoming).

⁵ L. Garland (ed.), *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience, 800–1200*, Publications of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, King's College London, 8 (Farnham, 2006).

⁶ See the collected essays of A.E. Laiou, *Gender, Society and Economic Life in Byzantium*, Collected studies series, 370 (Aldershot, 1992); *eadem*, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 31 (1981): pp. 233–60; *eadem*, 'Addendum to the Report on the Role of Women in Byzantine Society', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 32 (1982): pp. 198–204.

⁷ S. Lebecq, A. Dierkens, R. Le Jan, and J.-M. Sansterre (eds), *Femmes et pouvoirs de femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VI^e–XI^e siècles)*, Colloque international organisé les 28, 29, 30 mars 1996, à Bruxelles et Villeneuve d'Ascq (Lille, 1999).

⁸ Leslie Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith (eds), *Gender in the Early Medieval World, East and West 300–900* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁹ See S. Tougher's chapter, 'Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course', *infra*.

¹⁰ For marriage law and the increasing power of widows in the early Byzantine period see J. Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (IV^e–VII^e siècle): Vol. 1, Le droit impérial*, Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, Collège de France, Monographies 5 (Paris, 1990); *eadem*, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (IV^e–VII^e siècle): Vol. 2, Les pratiques sociales*, Travaux et Mémoires du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, Collège de France, Monographies 6 (Paris, 1992).

¹¹ An excellent overview of legal sources on women's status in the early Byzantine period is offered by A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1996), with an emphasis on property and family law.

¹² James, *Women, Men, and Eunuchs*, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

¹³ On Byzantine eunuchs, see now S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London; New York, 2010); K.M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003). More generally, see S. Tougher (ed.), *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (Cardiff, 2002).

¹⁴ S. Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London; Sydney, 1988, repr. London; New York,

1990), p. 4.

¹⁵ Garland, *Byzantine Women*, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

¹⁶ Garland, *Byzantine Women*, 'Introduction', p. xviii, referring to the essay of C. Juanno, 'Women in Byzantine Novels of the Twelfth Century: An Interplay Between Norm and Fantasy', *ibid.*, pp. 141–62.

¹⁷ Garland, *Byzantine Women*, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

¹⁸ James, 'Ghosts in the Machine: The Lives and Deaths of Constantinian Imperial Women', *infra*.

¹⁹ Carolyn L. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (Yale, 2004), pp. 146–58: 'Ordinary Women in the Orbit of Theodore of Sykeon'. St Theodore flourished in Sykeon in the late sixth to early seventh century.

²⁰ The remaining chapters of Connor, *ibid.*, are devoted to Macrina, Egeria, Galla Placidia, Mary of Egypt, Anicia Juliana, Empresses Theodora, Irene, Helena, Zoe and Anna Komnene, and in an epilogue, Theodora Synadene and the 'Lady of the Mongols'.

²¹ James, 'Introduction', *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, p. xvi.

²² Garland, "'Till Death Do Us Part?": Family Life in Byzantine Monasteries', *infra*.

²³ Such examples of elite female literacy are surveyed by Amelia Brown, 'Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in the Byzantine Empire', *infra*.

²⁴ See D. Costache, 'Living above Gender: Insights from St Maximus the Confessor', *Journal for Early Christian Studies* (forthcoming). Dr Costache presented an early draft of this paper at the Australian Association for Byzantine Studies conference on 'Gender and Class in Byzantine Society', University of New England, April 2010. I am grateful to Dr Costache for allowing me to consult his article before publication.

²⁵ J. Murray, 'One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?', in L.M. Bitel and F. Lifshitz (eds), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2008), pp. 34–51, at 35.

²⁶ L.M. Bitel, 'Convent ruins and Christian profession: toward a methodology for the history of religion and gender', in Bitel and Lifshitz, *Gender and Christianity*, pp. 1–15, at 6.

²⁷ James, *Women, Men and Eunuchs*, 'Introduction', p. xvii.

²⁸ See B. Neil, "'It is I who am a man, you who are women": Sayings of the Desert Mothers', *Women Church*, 35 (2004): pp. 11–15.

²⁹ According to D. Casey, *Flesh Made Word: Theology after Irigaray* (Saarbrücken, 2010), pp. 38–9. See further D. Casey, 'The Spiritual Valency of Gender in Byzantine Society', *infra*.

³⁰ B. Ward (trans.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collections* (rev. edn, London; Oxford, 1981).

³¹ 'Bessarion', (trans.) Ward, p. 41.

³² 'John the Dwarf', (trans.) Ward, pp. 93–4.

Chapter 2

Perceptions of Byzantine Virtus in Southern Italy, from the Eighth to Eleventh Centuries

Paul Brown

Introduction

In regard to Lombard and Norman perceptions of Byzantine virility (*virtus*) in eleventh-century southern Italy, scholars have regularly assumed that the characterisation of ‘effeminate Greeks’ present in certain works is merely a reiteration of an age-old stereotype found throughout chronicles of medieval western Europe. In 1928 Ernesto Pontieri, editor of the southern Italian *gesta* by the Norman Geoffrey Malaterra, suggested as much when juxtaposing a passage with one in Liudprand of Cremona’s tenth-century *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana* (RLC).¹ The idea has been more forcefully underscored in recent times by Ovidio Capitani,² Kenneth Baxter Wolf and Emily Albu. Wolf has argued that the derogatory epithet was a ‘common device used by “barbaric” Latins to deprecate “civilized” Greeks’.³ Albu has since concurred, noting that the ‘accusation is a cliché among western writers’.⁴ Yet a contrary view is very much demonstrable that the notion of Byzantine effeminacy is essentially restricted to one of the works written by that famous Ottonian propagandist and satirist. However, Liudprand’s RLC, regularly cited as evidence of western disdain for Byzantium, is rarely compared with his earlier literary outing – the *Antapodosis* – in which the empire is an exemplar of *virtus* (‘manliness’, ‘strength’, ‘power’, ‘excellence’).⁵ Significantly, while Liudprand wrote of his intention to narrate the ‘actions of feeble kings and effeminate princes’ in the *Antapodosis*, such individuals reside in the West rather than the East.⁶

The Narses Archetype in Paul the Deacon

Given the themes of both this book and this chapter, it is fitting to pose a question of some relevance: exactly how did a member of the ‘third gender’ – the eunuch general Narses – not only become a sort of *pater patriae* to the Lombards of southern Italy, but also come to serve

as an exemplar of that most important of medieval characteristics – *virtus*? Given the ‘effeminate’ epithet levelled at eunuchs in West and East alike, even when acting in ‘manly’ military roles, such a literary stylisation is nothing short of remarkable.⁷ It was Paul the Deacon (c.720–99) who established what will henceforth be designated as the ‘Narses tradition’, significantly embellishing the version he found in the anonymous seventh-century *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*. In his great work (c.790s), the *Historia Langobardorum* (HL), Paul chose to focus on the ‘glory days’ of the Lombard kingdom, rather than dealing with the contemporary situation – the dissolution of Lombard power in northern Italy at the hands of Charlemagne. Naturally this meant that he began his work with a narrative on the initial arrival of the Lombards into Italy, demonstrating how they came to rule the regions formerly subordinate to the Constantinopolitan emperor.

Narses, a sixth-century general of the emperor Justinian, had been faced with a rather daunting task when appointed to replace one of the most talented generals in history: Belisarius. But he had soon proved himself to be an able commander. The assignment was never easy, for he was regularly short of troops. With the Ostrogoths, Franks and Alemanni still posing a considerable threat to east Rome’s control of Italy, he had turned to Lombard mercenaries to bolster his forces.⁸ Despite his great services to the empire, he, much like Belisarius before him, was relieved of his command by a suspicious emperor, in this case Justinian’s successor, Justin II. Narses adhered to this directive but refused to leave Italy, retiring afterwards to Naples. A legend developed over time that in order to spite his thankless overlord, Narses invited the Lombard people, then in Pannonia, to seize Italy, with the enticement that it was positively ‘stuffed with riches’ (*refertam divitiis*).⁹ While Paul drew on the anonymous seventh-century *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* for the core of this story – that is, the ‘invitation’ of Narses – he significantly embellished it.¹⁰ The Narses tradition, at best, is of dubious historicity,¹¹ especially when the testimony of Procopius is recalled: soon after defeating Totila in 552, Narses sent the Lombards home on account of their lack of discipline.¹² Nonetheless, Paul moulded the invitation tradition into what became the foundation myth of the Lombard kingdom of Italy.¹³ Not only did it give the Lombards an increased sense of legitimacy, it also presented them with a sort of *pater patriae*. Narses, as Paul styled him, set the benchmark for the kings that would rule the Lombards. To be like Narses was to be an exemplar of Christian and military virtue.

In the hands of the erudite Lombard, Narses emerged as the ideal secular lord, for despite his warlike occupation he was pious, orthodox and a benefactor to churches.¹⁴ Such was the strength of his piety that

‘he obtained victory more by the thanksgivings offered to God than by the arms of war’.¹⁵ These idealised attributes were later transposed to King Liudprand (r.712–44) in Book VI. While he is ‘very powerful in war’ (*belli praepotens*), he is also ‘very pious and a lover of peace’.¹⁶ But the Narses archetype did not end there: Liudprand was ‘always more trusting in prayers than in arms’.¹⁷

Paul the Deacon’s Lombards versus Byzantines

Paul’s history, one of the most copied and influential texts of the Middle Ages, is of great importance when undertaking any assessment of Lombard historiography in southern Italy. Indeed, Paul was unequivocally the *pater historiae* of the Lombard south; his work was regularly copied at the abbey from which he hailed (Montecassino), and two Cassinese monks would later mention the influence of his work on theirs. Leo Marsicanus, for example, declared in the opening epistle of his late eleventh-century redaction of the *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis* (CMC): ‘One may see the relationship of the *Historia Langobardorum* to this work’.¹⁸ Accordingly, it is essential to assess the *HL*’s treatment of the Byzantines when attempting to ascertain the approach of its successors.

One of the principal Lombard literary traditions established by Paul was that of the eastern empire being a foreign and malignant presence in southern Italy. The reason for this negative stylisation has been explained by Walter Goffart as a deliberate attempt to convince the young *princeps Beneventanus* Grimoald III (r.787–806) that accord with the Carolingians, rather than the Byzantines, should be sought.¹⁹ Rosamond McKitterick has since found herself ‘totally unconvinced’ by Goffart’s argument, cautioning that Paul probably did not hold such a pro-Frankish outlook.²⁰ Yet well into the eleventh century, while the Lombards continued to be fiercely ‘nationalistic’, they nevertheless looked to others for assistance, or even overlordship (i.e. of the nominal kind). Sandwiched as they were between the Carolingian north and the Byzantine south (now reduced to the heel and toe of the Italian boot), the Beneventans clearly needed to make a choice; they did not, however, want to lose their sovereignty in the process. Having annexed the *regnum Langobardorum* in 774, Charlemagne turned his attention to the south – that is, the Lombard principality of Benevento, which under Prince Arichis II (r.758–87) had established a second capital at Salerno. To secure the principality’s obedience, Arichis’ son and heir, Grimoald, was taken hostage.²¹ Thanks to the lobbying of Arichis’ widow Adalperga, both Benevento’s independence and the release of its prince were achieved in 787. Although now at

Montecassino, Paul had spent time as an honoured guest at the Carolingian court: it is therefore possible, as Barbara Kreutz has posited, that Charlemagne was convinced by Paul ‘that a strong but loyal principality in the south of Italy would keep Byzantium in check’.²²

As Goffart has observed, Paul’s Lombards were to fall figuratively into the worship of false gods (Byzantium), only to be saved by a hero (Grimoald I) sent to them by God.²³ Elsewhere he notes that the characters of Peredeo and Rosemund are figuratively juxtaposed with Samson and Delilah, with the Byzantines taking on the role of the Philistines. Another of the key underlying themes of the *HL* is what Paul saw as the transformation of the Roman Empire: from Roman to ‘Greek’ ethnicity; from orthodoxy to perceived heterodoxy. This is exemplified through the favourable portraits of Justinian and Narses. Justinian is unquestionably emperor of the Roman Empire, distinguished by his reconquests, legal codifications, patronage of scholarship and church-building enterprises.²⁴ This notion of Byzantine *romanitas* and *catholicitas*, however, has disappeared soon after Justinian’s death, and Paul illustrates this by drawing attention to the accession of Maurice: ‘the first of the Greek people confirmed in the supreme power’.²⁵ From Maurice (r.582–602) onwards, the ‘Greeks’ descend into a maelstrom of heresy, plots and counterplots, and, in a theme that will be utilised by his eleventh-century Lombard counterpart, Amatus of Montecassino, the deadly sin of *avaritia*.²⁶ By distancing the Byzantines from their Roman heritage, Paul indicates that not only is their hold on Italy without justification, but that it can only be pernicious, for their interests will always lie closer to the heart of their empire rather than with Paul’s much-beloved Italy.

Erchempert on the Byzantines

While Paul certainly had nothing positive to say about the empire, he did not call the *virtus* of Byzantine males into question nor, for that matter, did his Cassinese successor in the following century (c.890), Erchempert. In his *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum* (*HLB*) the monk conceded that while they may be ‘of similar condition [to us]’ and are certainly ‘Christians by name’, they are nonetheless ‘more sorrowful in their way of life’ (*moribus tristiores*) than the Muslims.²⁷ So Paul’s covetous and heterodox interlopers were later lumped together by Erchempert with that other, most unwelcome people in the south – the Muslims. Like the *HL*, the *HLB* conveyed the idea that an alliance with Byzantium was not to be sought. It is no small irony, then, to note that, especially in the ninth and tenth centuries (c.880–

960), Constantinopolitan suzerainty was generally acknowledged by the Lombards.²⁸

Erchempert also recorded something else that is of more direct relevance to Lombard perceptions of Byzantine virility: Charlemagne consented to release Prince Grimoald II provided the Beneventans agreed to acknowledge Carolingian lordship over their currency, their charters and even their heads! Shaving, it was related in the *HLB*, was to be done in the Frankish manner.²⁹ While he did not relate the actual result of this interesting agreement, apparently the Lombards felt the Byzantines to be manly enough; they promised to adopt – much to the chagrin of Pope Hadrian and no doubt Paul the Deacon, too – eastern imperial dress and haircuts once the Franks had returned north.³⁰

Liudprand of Cremona

Despite the fact that he was not a southerner (*Longobardus*) but a northerner (*Lombardus*), two of Liudprand of Cremona's works are of some importance. Firstly, both the *Antapodosis* and *RLC* – both written in the 960s – tell us a considerable amount about relations between Byzantium and Italy in the second half of the tenth century. Moreover, while the *RLC* is regularly held to have been written for the first emperor of the Ottonian dynasty, Otto I (r.962–73), Henry Mayr-Harting has argued that it was in fact intended for the rulers of the now divided principality of Benevento: Pandulf of Capua and Landulf of Benevento.³¹ If this hypothesis is correct, the *RLC* can be read in a manner similar to Paul's *HL* – that is, much like the *HL* imparted to Grimoald II that the southern Lombards should align themselves with the Franks instead of the Byzantines, the *RLC* exhorted the southern princes to look to Otto I as their overlord and protector, not Nikephoros II Phokas (r.963–9).

All will no doubt recall the *RLC*'s famous portrayal of the 'pygmy', Nikephoros II, who struts around the capital in his 'womanly' (*muliebris*) garment.³² Byzantinists, among others, have taken Liudprand's humorous sketch to be representative of western notions of Byzantine 'effeminacy'.³³ Yet in his earlier work, the *Antapodosis*, the eastern emperors are always 'most pious', 'august' and 'humane',³⁴ whereas the Nikephoros of the *RLC* is styled in the manner of Willa's chaplain, Dominic, in the *Antapodosis*: *rusticum, setigerum, indocilem, agrestum, barbarum, durum, villosum ... rebellum*.³⁵ So closely does Nikephoros' description mirror Dominic's that the famous characterisation of Phokas loses some of its acclaimed literary lustre. Indeed, in one of the sections where Liudprand assaults Nikephoros

with a litany of derogatory adjectives, he has simply reproduced the earlier diatribe against Dominic with identical terms assembled in the same order: *rustice ... setiger, indocilis, agrestis, barbare, dure, villose, rebellis*.³⁶

Other Chronicles and Annals

Liudprand's characterisation of a diminutive, effete and militarily inept emperor must be contrasted with the portrayal found in the contemporary *Chronicon Salernitanum*. Closely modelling his work on Paul's *HL*,³⁷ the anonymous Salernitan chronicler naturally chose to portray the empire in a similarly negative fashion; he was nonetheless moved to refer to Nikephoros II as 'a brave, just man and conqueror of diverse peoples'.³⁸ Liudprand did, however, record the feared general's moniker – 'the Pale Death of the Saracens' – albeit for a rather different purpose, but its very mention suggests that Phokas' bellicose reputation preceded him in the West.³⁹

The martial exploits of Phokas and his successors, John I and Basil II, were probably well known to eleventh-century southern Italian chroniclers, who drew not only on earlier, lengthier chronicles such as the *Chronicon Salernitanum*, but also on no-longer-extant works whose basic data is retained to varying degrees in the brief annals that survive.⁴⁰ The emphasis is on brief here, for the Spartan format of the various works is best demonstrated with the following complete entries under the years 963 and 970 (= 969) in the annals of the so-called 'Lupus Protospatarius': '[963] Emperor Romanos [II] dies, and Nikephoros is raised up, reigning for 7 years ... [970] [John I] Tzimiskes has killed emperor Nikephoros, and elevated himself'.⁴¹ But it is interesting to note that in the same annals Phokas' 961 capture of Crete is also recorded, although the victory is attributed to the reigning emperor Romanos II, as was the annalistic convention.⁴² William of Apulia's *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, completed c.1097–99, is believed to have drawn on the same lost annals used by annalists such as 'Lupus';⁴³ indeed, the epic poem seems to allude to them, despite its classicising context, when making the younger Boioannes remind his troops before a battle with the Normans in the 1040s that formerly 'the westerly regions and all areas of the world were accustomed to fearing the reputation of the Greeks'.⁴⁴

Amatus of Montecassino

One of the principal sources for eleventh-century southern Italian

history is the *Historia Normannorum* (*HN*) written by monk Amatus of Montecassino. Although Amatus' origin is difficult to pinpoint with any degree of certainty, he was almost certainly a Lombard, possibly from the principality of Salerno and, according to Anselmo Lentini, may well have been a former Bishop of Pesto (Paestum) / Capaccio.⁴⁵ In the opening dedication, Amatus identifies himself as a Cassinese monk whose work is dedicated to, and commissioned by, Abbot Desiderius.⁴⁶ The career of Desiderius reflects the importance of Montecassino during the eleventh century, for aside from his abbacy (r.1058–87), he was made a cardinal by Nicholas II (1059) and was later elected pope in 1086 (Victor III, r.1086–87).⁴⁷ As Cowdrey has shown, the abbacy of Desiderius ushered in Montecassino's 'golden age' – a period where scholarship and building flourished and, as Bloch has suggested, an age when the abbey was second to none as a cultural and political centre in western Europe.⁴⁸

Completed c.1080–82, the *HN* also bears the influence of Paul the Deacon's *HL*; indeed, Amatus mentions Paul and his work by name, referring to him as 'a deacon and monk of this monastery'.⁴⁹ Moreover, he indicates that just as Paul recounted the deeds of those who established themselves in the Italy of his time, so too will he perform the same task for the recently arrived Normans who, much like the Lombards, were *devot à notre Monastier*.⁵⁰ Paul's Narses tradition also makes an appearance: according to Amatus' version of the Norman origins in Italy, it was initially through the military services rendered to Prince Guaimar III of Salerno (r.999–1027) that these foreigners came to reside in, and now dominate, southern Italy. The *HL* was the obvious authority for Amatus to consult, and turn to it he did; the result was that the Normans came to resemble the Lombards of Pannonia. That this was undoubtedly the writer's intention is confirmed by returning to Leo Marsicanus' version of the *Montecassino Chronicle*. When copying the Guaimar III/Narses section from the *HN* into the *CMC*, Leo, noted above as an *HL* devotee, appreciated the allusion, adding 'like another Narses' (*veluti ... Narsis*) to his own version.⁵¹

Amatus' Norman leaders also conformed to the ideal of leadership that Paul had established with the portrait of Narses. Richard and Robert are similarly notable for their piety and their benefactions to churches and monasteries; and, importantly, they attribute their victories to God rather than themselves.⁵² This theme was in accordance with Paul's declaration in Book One: 'Indeed, victory cannot be ascribed to the power of men, but is rather furnished by heaven.'⁵³ Not only was Paul's maxim echoed throughout the *HN*, but its heroes also conformed to the characterisation of the idealised Narses. For example, Richard of Capua ascribes his power 'more to the

mercy of God than his own strength', and Robert Guiscard, when gaining victory over the Saracens in Sicily, 'gave thanks to Almighty God from whom every victory and triumph derives'.⁵⁴

Graham Loud has noted that Amatus was influenced by Erchempert's portrayal of the Lombards. In the *HLB* Erchempert had implied that the depredations of the invaders, in this case the Saracens, were brought about by the lack of unity among the Lombards; it was their sins that had incurred God's wrath.⁵⁵ For Amatus, the sins of the Lombards once again brought divine retribution, this time manifested in the Normans. Alexander of Teleso did not disagree, opining in the following century that, as God had ordained, the 'vigorous sins of the Lombards' had been 'subdued by the violence of the Normans'.⁵⁶ As Amatus had it, God's wrath was invoked through the devilish conduct of princes Pandulf IV of Capua (r.1016–26, d.1049) and Gisulf II of Salerno (r.1052–77, d.1091?), who are the counterpoints to the Normans who would become their successors: Richard of Capua, and Robert Guiscard, who had made Salerno his capital in 1077.⁵⁷ Central among the various 'evils' perpetrated by the Lombard princes were their treasonous relations with the Byzantine Empire. After the crushing defeat of the Lombard revolt led by Meles of Bari at the Battle of Canne in 1018, Pandulf had not only sent the keys of Capua to Constantinople in 1019,⁵⁸ but had also helped imperial forces to lay siege to a fortification on the River Garigliano; a tower which, according to Amatus, Pope Benedict VIII had given to the co-conspirator and brother-in-law of Meles, Datto.⁵⁹ The tower was taken and Pandulf handed over Datto to the Byzantines,⁶⁰ who was then promptly executed at Bari.⁶¹ Gisulf raised the bar even higher: in addition to visiting Constantinople in order to secure an alliance against Amatus' heroic Normans, he later plotted an act *de la traison* when involving himself in Pope Gregory VII's 'proto-crusade' of 1074, an expedition intended to deal with the Normans in the south before assisting the empire against the Selçuk Turks in Anatolia.⁶²

Unequivocally, Amatus' *HN* pours scorn on the empire, and those who associate with it, whenever the opportunity presents itself. Continuing in the tradition of the forefathers of Lombard historiography, Amatus' Greeks are foreign and cruel oppressors; they are little better than the Saracens. But they suffer from other flaws too, most notably the inability to be manly. These 'men like women' deserve to be expelled from the region;⁶³ it is the Normans, styled by the monk as avenging angels, who fulfil the inscrutable will of God by driving these nefarious neo-Amalekites from the Promised Land.⁶⁴ Interestingly, however, this literary approach was not at all representative of Montecassino's relationship with Constantinople.

During Desiderius' abbacy, a Greek-speaking monk, George, was custodian (*custos*) of the abbey's treasures.⁶⁵ There were also Byzantines to be found among the monks at Montecassino, some of whom must have been responsible for the production of the impressive Cassinese Greek manuscripts.⁶⁶

Montecassino's interaction with Greek-speakers was not restricted to scholars and monks, for Byzantine artists and artisans were employed by Desiderius for their expertise in mosaics and pavements ('in arte musiarum et quadratarum'), skills which Leo Marsicanus asserted as being neglected in Italy for 'more than five hundred years'.⁶⁷ The individuals with these unique skills were not recruited from the local Greek-speaking population of southern Italy, they were procured from Constantinople; indeed, the Emperor Romanos IV (r.1068–71) is said to have assisted Desiderius' envoy with recruitment choices.⁶⁸ It is important to note that the years of Romanos' reign correspond exactly to the duration of Robert Guiscard's siege of Bari (1068–71). Therefore, despite Montecassino's close relationship with the duke, the friendship between abbey and empire was unimpaired. Romanos' successor, Michael VII Doukas, was very much aware of the Desiderian project of beautification. A glowing reference was made to the 'most celebrated and glorious church constructed in the name of our most blessed father Benedict' in a 1076 letter to the abbot.⁶⁹ The emperor went on to stress that the new basilica's fame was less attributable to its splendour than to the virtues of Desiderius and his retinue.⁷⁰ Additionally, the abbey was issued with a donation.⁷¹

Byzantine Manliness

Despite all of this fascinating interaction between the Lombards and Byzantines, Amatus seems to have found it necessary to demonise all who dared to oppose military expansion by the abbey's Norman patrons, and hence not only imperial figures but other prominent individuals such as Prince Gisulf II of Salerno and Pope Gregory VII, were also treated with open or barely concealed contempt. Amatus' anti-imperial broadsides aside, it is important to note that favourable impressions of Byzantine *virtus* can nonetheless be found. Gisulf II, we are told by the monk, was known to attire himself in a Byzantine-style mantle. While association with the empire usually provided Amatus with an opportunity to launch another attack on all things imperial, surprisingly on this occasion he referred to the mantle as 'beautiful' (*bel*).⁷² Gisulf's penchant for Byzantine attire extended to his coinage. Modelling it on a *histamenon* of Constantine X (r.1058–67), Gisulf,

ruler of 'wealthy Salerno', not only wields the *globus cruciger* but is garbed in imperial finery.⁷³

The popularity of imperial vestments, particularly mantles, in Italy and western Europe had been attested a century earlier by Liudprand of Cremona. Upset at having had his purple mantles (*pallia*) confiscated by the 'genderless' (*neutros*) – the disparaging term used by the Lombard to denote eunuchs – Liudprand turned to what he most positively excelled at: humour. These garments are hardly anything special, he says, for if they were, why then are they worn by prostitutes in Italy?⁷⁴ But behind the jocularly there is an indication of the dissemination of such attire; the courtesans wear them, and so do the 'magicians'.⁷⁵ This piqued the interest of those thieves without gender: how do the Italians get their hands on these mantles? 'From Venetian and Amalfitan peddlers', responded Liudprand.⁷⁶ While clearly distorting the real clientele for such garments, Liudprand is not exaggerating when referring to the dissemination of these *pallia* by Italian maritime cities with trading rights at Constantinople. As Armand Citarella has observed, European nobles as well as popes and abbots (e.g. Desiderius) were known to purchase them from the Amalfitans.⁷⁷ While Liudprand himself indicated that the confiscated mantles were earmarked for ecclesiastical usage, it is clear from his evidence, however distorted, that they were worn by the laity, too. In addition to Gisulf II's mantle, Amatus also related that Richard – the future Norman prince of Capua – wore silken garments given to him by Prince Guaimar IV of Salerno when invested as count of Aversa in 1050.⁷⁸ These examples obviously attest to the continuing importance of such attire in the frontier regions of Italy.

Imperial dress, be it ceremonial, casual or martial, received favourable descriptions in other eleventh-century works. A particularly interesting example is that found in William of Apulia's *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*. While he has often been claimed to be a Norman, this writer agrees with those who argue for William's Italian/Lombard extraction.⁷⁹ Not only does the poem indicate that certain high-ranking Lombards under imperial rule attired themselves in the fashion of their overlords, but it also suggests that the Normans were rather taken with it:⁸⁰

At that place [Monte Gargano] they [Normans] witness
A man attired in the Greek fashion, named Meles,
Unaccustomed to the strange dress of the exile,
They admire the turban wrapped around his head.

Despite the fact that Meles of Bari (d.1022) was then soliciting troops for a second insurrection against the empire (1017–18), he nonetheless attired himself in Byzantine-style clothing, and had

already christened his son with a Greek name (*Argyros*, ‘the silver’). William’s passage also provides an insight into Norman perceptions of imperial dress, although it has rather curiously been used to support the idea that the Normans, or William himself,⁸¹ held the Byzantines to be effeminate.⁸² Yet the verb ‘they marvel at’ (*mirantur*) hardly conveys the sense of one culture recoiling from the dress of another. Moreover, positive Norman views of Byzantine dress exist in another passage dealing with military garb. Geoffrey Malaterra referred to Joscelyn of Molfetta, a fellow Norman sent by the Emperor Romanos IV to lift Robert Guiscard’s siege of Bari (1068–71), as being ‘attired wonderfully in the Greek style’.⁸³ Clearly, then, if either the Normans or the Lombards really perceived Byzantine attire to be effeminate, they would hardly either wear it themselves or refer to it in glowing terms. This contention is considerably bolstered by the consideration that Norman rulers, be they in England or Italy, had portrayed themselves as eastern emperors on coinage in the 1060s and 70s.⁸⁴ While William the Conqueror and, almost certainly, Robert Guiscard did not don such garb in reality, evidently in their eyes imperial vestments were not womanly but manly.

In fact, when various prominent western works from the Ostrogothic period until the end of the eleventh century are compared, an age-old stereotype can be identified: it is not, however, related to notions of ‘effeminacy’ but of ‘cunning’ (*callidus*, *versutia* or *astutia*), a label generally linked to ‘treachery’ (*perfidia* or *fraus*). Cassiodorus, for example, wrote of the sixth-century East Roman penchant for ‘verbal trickery’ (*argutia*).⁸⁵ Similarly Notker, in his late ninth-century biography of Charlemagne (c.880s), styled the ‘Hellenes’ as ‘most false’ or ‘most untrustworthy’ (*vanissima*),⁸⁶ a familiar *topos* also found in chronicles written in the first half of the eleventh century by Wipo of Burgundy and Thietmar of Merseburg who, to use the words of the latter, wrote of ‘the customary cunning of the Greeks’ (*Greci solita calliditate*).⁸⁷ To outsmart the Byzantines greatly distinguished one’s *gens*: Notker, for one, praised the ability of ‘a wise Frank’ (*sapiens ... Francigena*) – Bishop Haito of Basel, sent on a mission to Constantinople by Charlemagne – who ‘surpassed’ (*exsuperata*) the wiles of the Byzantines ‘in their native land’ (*in patriam suam*).⁸⁸ Notions of cunning and treachery would continue to be a feature of late eleventh-century historical writing, for Amatus of Montecassino opined that the Byzantines had always ‘customarily defeated their enemies through malicious reasoning and subtle treachery’.⁸⁹ Guile was a Byzantine trait, thought Arnulf of Milan: by becoming Pope John XVI in 997, the Greek-speaking bishop of Piacenza John Philagathos had ‘cunningly tried to transfer the dignity of the Roman Empire to the Greeks’.⁹⁰ Writing in the 1080s, at a time

when Amatus was dismissing imperial soldiery in southern Italy as ‘men like women’ (*home comme femmes*), Arnulf, a northern Lombard, who quite unlike his Cassinese counterpart had no affiliation with the Norman princes, observed that the interlopers from northern France were so successful in southern Italy precisely because they ‘had become fiercer than the Greeks and more wild than the Saracens’.⁹¹

Conclusion

What should we make of these various observations based on literary and numismatic evidence? Were Byzantine males regarded as effeminate by the Lombards and other westerners? The bulk of the evidence seems to lead to an answer of no. Certainly, the epithets *muliebris* or *effeminatus* were employed on occasion, yet this tells us little more than what is obvious – that is, since classical antiquity, the standard way of insulting enemies and ‘others’ was to strip them of their *virtus*. By the close of the twelfth century, it was an increasingly common way of denigrating the males of Byzantium; it would become even more common after the sack of Constantinople in 1204. But these negative assessments of Byzantine virility were politically motivated, and should therefore not be taken too literally, nor should they be applied uncritically to earlier centuries. Arguably, until the death of Manuel Komnenos in 1180 – an emperor ‘celebrated by the Greeks and Latins as the Alexander or the Hercules of the age’, as Gibbon put it long ago⁹² – Byzantium was still seen by many to be the most wealthy and powerful state in Europe and the Near East. Such a perception was similarly held in southern Italy in the eighth to eleventh centuries, especially prior to the Norman period. The Byzantines were often enemies, but the Lombards were considerably impressed by imperial culture nonetheless, an influence reflected at various times in dress, hairstyles, coinage and political allegiance. Indubitably, two Lombards presented a rather different view. Yet given their specific literary imperatives, the hostility expressed by Liudprand and Amatus should not be surprising. Finally, should an age-old literary stereotype of the empire in the eighth to eleventh centuries require identification, it was ‘cunning’ or ‘treachery’ rather than ‘effeminacy’.

- 1 E. Pontieri (ed.), in Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardis Ducis fratris eius*, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 5.1 (Bologna, 1928), p. 64, n. 4.
- 2 O. Capitani, 'Specific Motivations and Continuing Themes in the Norman Chronicles of Southern Italy: Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in *The Normans in Sicily and Southern Italy: Lincei Lectures 1974* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 1–46, esp. pp. 32–3, n. 15. As Capitani writes in reference to Malaterra and Liudprand, effeminacy 'was a commonly received idea on the Byzantines'.
- 3 K.B. Wolf, *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy* (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 118, n. 33; see also p. 94.
- 4 E. Albu, *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge, 2001), p. 135, esp. n. 56.
- 5 On Liudprand's view of the empire in the *Antapodosis*, see M. Rentschler, *Liudprand von Cremona: Eine Studie zum ost-westlichen Kulturgefälle im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt, 1981), pp. 9–16; K.J. Leyser, 'Ends and Means in Liudprand of Cremona', in J.D. Howard-Johnston (ed.), *Byzantium and the West c.850–c.1200. Proceedings of the XVIII Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 119–43, esp. p. 130.
- 6 Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, (ed.) J. Becker, MGH SRG, 41 (Hannover, 1915), 1.1, p. 4: 'enervorum facta regum principumve effeminatorum'. All translations throughout are my own.
- 7 For example, see Claudian's various broadsides against the eunuch consul Eutropius (399) in J. Long, *Claudian's In Eutropium, or, How, When, and Why to Slander a Eunuch* (Chapel Hill, NC; London, 1996), p. 107. Almost five centuries later, Liudprand of Cremona took great delight in denigrating the 'soft, effeminate ... genderless, idle' ('molles, effoeminatos ... neutros, desides') eunuchs of Constantinople: *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana*, (ed.) J. Becker, MGH SRG, 41 (Hannover, 1915), 54, p. 204. A Byzantine example is the late eleventh-century *Synopsis Historion* by John Skylitzes, who referred to the eunuch commander Constantine Gongyles as 'an effeminate man, reared in the shade' (*thēlydrian anthrōpon kai skiatraphē*): *Ioannis Skylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, (ed.) H. Thurn, CFHB 5 (Berlin, 1973) Con. VII, 15, 245.
- 8 Procop. *Goth.* 8.25.15, 26.19, 31.5; N. Christie, *The Lombards* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 36–7.
- 9 Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, (ed.) L. Bethmann and G. Waitz, MGH SRLI (Hannover, 1878) 2.5, p. 75 (hereafter Paul, HL).
- 10 *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, (ed.) Waitz, MGH SRLI, p. 4: 'Alboin has himself led the Lombards into Italy, invited by Narses of the scribes' ('Ipse Albuin adduxit Langobardos in Italia, invitatos a Narsete scribarum'). The classic study of Paul's sources is T. Mommsen, 'Die Quellen der Langobardengeschichte des Paulus Diaconus', *Neues Archiv*, 5 (1880): pp. 51–103.
- 11 Christie, however, suggests that the invitation, aside from the spurious spite motive, may have been 'an official action of federate settlement' (*The Lombards*, 62).
- 12 Procop. *Goth.* 8.33.2–3.
- 13 It is interesting to note here that a version of this story ended up in chapter 27 of the tenth-century work by – or attributed to – Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. While the essence of Narses' invitation is similar, the words are rendered in an Old Testament manner: Italy is not a region 'stuffed with riches'; it is nothing less than a land of 'milk and honey' (*meli kai gala*). For the passage, see *De Administrando Imperio*, (ed.) Gy. Moravcsik and trans. R.J.H. Jenkins, CFHB, 1 (Washington DC, 1967), 27, p. 114.

- ¹⁴ Paul, *HL* 2.3, pp. 73–4.
- ¹⁵ Paul, *HL* 2.3, p. 74: ‘ut plus supplicationibus ad Deum profusis quam armis bellicis victoriam obtineret’. Because it makes better sense in English, *profusis* (‘poured’) is rendered here as ‘offered’.
- ¹⁶ Paul, *HL* 6.58, 187: ‘pius admodum et pacis amator’.
- ¹⁷ Paul, *HL* 6.58, 187: ‘plus semper orationibus quam armis fidens’.
- ¹⁸ *Epistola Leonis*, in *Chronica Monasterii Casinensis*, (ed.) H. Hoffmann, MGH SS, 34 (Hannover, 1984) (hereafter *CMC*), p. 7: ‘huic operi necessariis, historia videlicet Langobardorum’.
- ¹⁹ W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede and Paul the Deacon* (rev. edn, Indiana, 2005 (orig. 1988)), pp. 406, 430.
- ²⁰ R. McKitterick, ‘Paul the Deacon and the Franks’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 8.3 (1999): pp. 319–39, esp. 326. She does, however, concede that Paul ‘may well have acknowledged the benefits of Frankish rule’.
- ²¹ *Annales Regni Francorum*, (ed.) F. Kurze, MGH SSRGius, 6 (Hannover, 1895), p. 74, *ad an.* 787.
- ²² B. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1991), p. 7.
- ²³ Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 385, 399, 402.
- ²⁴ Paul, *HL* 1.25, 62–3.
- ²⁵ Paul, *HL* 3.15, 100: ‘primus ex Grecorum genere in imperio confirmatus est’.
- ²⁶ Paul, *HL* 5.11, 150: ‘Grecorum avaricia’.
- ²⁷ Erchempert, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, (ed.) Waitz, MGH SRLI, 81, p. 264: ‘Achivi autem, ut habitudinis similes sunt, ita animo aequales sunt bestiis, vocabulo christiani, set moribus tristiores Agarenis’.
- ²⁸ C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400–1000* (Michigan, 1981), p. 146.
- ²⁹ Erchempert, *Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, 4, p. 236.
- ³⁰ Kreutz, *Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, p. 7.
- ³¹ H. Mayr-Harting, ‘Liudprand of Cremona’s Account of his Legation to Constantinople (968) and Ottonian Imperial Strategy’, *The English Historical Review*, 116.467 (2001): pp. 539–56, esp. 547–9.
- ³² Liudprand, *Relatio*, 3, p. 177: *pygmaeum*; 40, p. 197: *muliebri vestitu veste diversus* (i.e. Otto’s attire is the opposite of ‘womanly’, unlike that worn by his eastern counterpart, Phokas).
- ³³ D.J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantium: Church, Society, and Civilisation Seen through Contemporary Eyes* (Chicago, 1984), p. 357; J. Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades* (Oxford, 2006), p. 90.
- ³⁴ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, 1.6, p. 7, 2.26, p. 85: *piissimus imperator* (Leo VI); 3.22, p. 82: *imperator, liberalis, humanus, prudens ac pius* (Romanos I); 1.8, p. 8: *imperator augustus* (Basil I); 2.45, p. 57: *imperatoribus augustis* (Leo VI and his brother, Alexander).
- ³⁵ Liudprand, *Antapodosis*, 5.32, p. 150.
- ³⁶ Liudprand, *Relatio*, 3, p. 177.
- ³⁷ U. Westerbergh (ed.), *Chronicon Salernitanum*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia, 3 (Stockholm, 1959), pp. 197–202.
- ³⁸ *Chronicon Salernitanum*, 173, p. 555: ‘imperator Niciforius ... vir bonus et iustus atque diversorum gencium preliator’.

³⁹ Liudprand, *Relatio*, 10, p. 181: *pallida Saracenorum mors*. On Nikephoros' martial reputation, see R. Morris, 'The Two Faces of Nikephoros Phokas', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 12 (1988): pp. 83–115.

⁴⁰ On the annals and their sources, see F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1907), xxvii–xxxi.

⁴¹ Lupus Protospatarius, *Chronicon* (ed.) G.H. Pertz, MGH SS, 5 (Hannover, 1844), pp. 54–5, *ad annos* 963, 970: 'obiit Romano imperator, et elevatus est Nichiphorus, qui regnavit ann. 7 ... occidit Simischi Nichiforum imperatorem, et elevatus est ille'; cf. *Annales Beneventani* (ed.) Pertz, MGH SS, 3 (Hannover, 1839), p. 176, *ad an.* 969: 'Niciphorus imperator occiditur; et Simiski extollitur'. As is evident with this comparison, annals were widely disseminated throughout the monastic network in southern Italy, which is why the entries can be more than a little similar at times.

⁴² Lupus Protospatarius, *Chronicon*, p. 54, *ad an.* 961: 'insula Cretes comprehensa est a Graecis sub Romano mense Marti' ('the island of Crete is captured by the Greeks under Romanos in the month of May').

⁴³ R. Wilmans (ed.), *Guillermi Apuliensis, Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, MGH SS, 9 (Hannover, 1851), p. 240; Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande*, vol. 1, p. xxxix.

⁴⁴ William of Apulia, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard* (ed.) and trans. M. Mathieu, Istituto siciliano di studi bizantini e neoellenici, Testi e monumenti, 4 (Palermo, 1961), 1.361–2, p. 118: 'Partibus occiduus Graecorum fama timori / Omnibus et mundi regionibus esse solebat'.

⁴⁵ W. Smidt, 'Die "Historia Normannorum" von Amatus', *Studii Gregoriani*, 3 (1948): pp. 173–231, esp. 217–21; A. Lentini, 'Ricerche Biografiche su Amato di Montecassino', *Benedictina*, 9 (1955): pp. 183–96; G.A. Loud, 'Introduction', in G.A. Loud (ed.) and P.N. Dunbar (trans.), *The History of the Normans by Amatus of Montecassino* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 1–38, esp. pp. 11–15. In a chapter entitled *De Amato*, Cassinese archivist and librarian Peter the Deacon referred to Amatus sometime in the 1130s as 'episcopus, et Casinensis monachus': *De viris illustribus Casinensibus opusculum*, 20, PL 173, 1032A.

⁴⁶ Amatus, *Storia de' Normanni*, (ed.) V. de Bartholomaeis, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia* (Rome, 1935) *Dedica*, pp. 3–5 (hereafter Amatus).

⁴⁷ CMC, 3.12, p. 374 (cardinal), 3.66, p. 449 (pope).

⁴⁸ On Montecassino's 'golden age', see H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Age of Abbot Desiderius: Montecassino, the Papacy, and the Normans in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 1–45; H. Bloch, 'Monte Cassino, Byzantium and the West in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 3 (1946): pp. 163–224, esp. 193–222; *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1986), pp. 40–110.

⁴⁹ Amatus, *Dedica*, p. 4: 'dyacone et moine de cest Monastier'. Unfortunately for posterity, the *HN* survives only in an early fourteenth-century Italianate Old French translation: the *Ystoire de li Normant*.

⁵⁰ Amatus, *Dedica*, p. 4.

⁵¹ Paul, *HL* 2.5, p. 75; cf. Amatus, 1.17–19, pp. 21–4; CMC, 2.37, p. 237. The allusion to the *HL* passage was identified in Hoffmann's edition of the CMC (p. 237, n.7) and has since received a short comment by Loud (*The History of the Normans by Amatus of Montecassino*, 50, n. 22).

⁵² Amatus, 2.21, p. 80; 4.30, p. 205.

⁵³ Paul, *HL* 1.8, p. 52: 'Victoria enim non potestati est adtributa hominum, sed de caelo potius ministratur.' Also quoted, with some variation, by William of Apulia,

2.146–7, p. 140: ‘But victory in war is not due to numbers, nor horses, nor people, nor arms, but to him to whom it is given by heaven.’ (‘At non in numero, nec equis, nec gente, nec armis, / Sed cui de coelo datur, est victoria belli.’).

⁵⁴ Amatus, 4.30, p. 205: ‘par la misericorde de Dieu que la soë force’; 5.18, p. 237: ‘il en rendi grace à Dieu toutpuissant, de loquel procede toute victoire et triumphe’.

⁵⁵ Loud, ‘The *Gens Normannorum* – Myth or Reality?’, *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4 (1981): pp. 104–16, esp. 112; Loud, *The History of the Normans by Amatus of Montecassino*, p. 31.

⁵⁶ *Alexandri Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Siciliae, Calabrie atque Apulie*, (ed.) L. de Nava, *Fonti per la storia d’Italia*, 112 (Rome, 1991), p. 3: ‘Nam sicut ipso Deo disponente, vel permittente, vigens longobardorum nequitia supervenientium normannorum violentia olim comprimenda fuit ...’.

⁵⁷ On Amatus’ treatment of Pandulf and Gisulf, see Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 96–8, 112–15.

⁵⁸ *CMC*, 2.38, p. 241.

⁵⁹ Amatus, 1.26, p. 35.

⁶⁰ *Anonymi Barensis Chronicon*, (ed.) L.A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 5 (repr. Bologna, 1967), p. 149, *ad an.* 1021; *Annales Casinenses*, (ed.) Pertz, *MGH SS*, 19 (Hannover, 1866), p. 305, *ad an.* 1020, *Cod.* 1, *ad an.* 1021, *Cod.* 2 and 3.

⁶¹ Amatus, 1.26, pp. 35–6; *CMC*, 2.38, pp. 241–2; Lupus Protospatarius, *Chronicon*, p. 57, *ad an.* 1021.

⁶² Amatus, 4.13, 305. For the proposed ‘crusade’, see Cowdrey, ‘Pope Gregory VII’s Crusading Plans of 1074’, in B.Z. Kedar, H. Mayer and R. Smail (eds), *Outremer: Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem presented to Joshua Prawer* (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 27–40.

⁶³ Amatus, 1.21, p. 27: ‘estoient comme fames’; 2.17, p. 75: ‘homes feminines’; p. 76: ‘homes comme fames’.

⁶⁴ Amatus, 1.20, p. 26. The Normans ‘arrived armed, not as enemies, but like angels’ (‘vindrent armés, non come anemis, mès come angele’).

⁶⁵ F. Newton, ‘The Desiderian Scriptorium at Monte Cassino: The ‘Chronicle’ and Some Surviving Manuscripts’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 30 (1976): pp. 35–54, esp. 53.

⁶⁶ Newton, ‘The Desiderian Scriptorium at Monte Cassino’, pp. 51–3.

⁶⁷ *CMC*, 3.27, p. 396: ‘quoniam artium istarum ingenium a quingentis et ultra iam annis magistra Latinitas intermiserat’.

⁶⁸ *CMC*, 3.27, p. 396; 3.32, pp. 403–405; Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, pp. 40–41; cf. Amatus, 3.52, p. 175, who wrote of ‘homes grex et sarrazins’, recruited by Desiderius from Constantinople and Alexandria.

⁶⁹ The quotation is from the *Register* of Peter the Deacon (Latin quoted by Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, p. 43 n. 1: ‘celeberrima et famosissima ecclesia constructa in nomine beatissimi patris nostri Benedicti’).

⁷⁰ Bloch, *Monte Cassino in the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, p. 43, n. 1: ‘nec ornatu et divitiis tantum verum potius virtutibus abbatis nunc in ea existentis Desiderii, patris nostri imperii, discipulorumque eius’.

⁷¹ Cowdrey, *Age of Desiderius*, pp. 18, 34.

⁷² Amatus, 4.38, p. 208: ‘Et lo mantel mostra defors, quar se crooit, pour ce que estoit bel, abouber la face de lo Impereor.’

⁷³ For a discussion of this and other coins of the prince, see P. Grierson, ‘The Salernitan Coinage of Gisulf II (1052–77) and Robert Guiscard (1077–85)’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 24 (1956): pp. 37–59. The reverse side features the

inscription, *OPVLENTA SALERNO* (see the reproduction in de Bartholomeis' edition of the *HN* (in Amatus, p. 207)).

⁷⁴ Liudprand, *Relatio*, 55, p. 205: *obolariae mulieres*. As Becker observes in a pertinent footnote, the phrase resembles Plautus' *Diobolares meretrices* ('the two obol prostitutes' of Plaut. *Poen.* 1.2.58; see MGH SRG, 41, p. 205, n. 1). Liudprand's rendering therefore means something like 'the obol women'.

⁷⁵ An obscure term is used: *mandrogerontes*. It is not Latin, but a Greek compound; it seems to recall the stem *mant*, pertaining to prophecy, magic and divination (e.g. *mandragoras*: 'mandrake root'), and *gerontion* ('old man'). Wright translates it as 'conjurers', van der Eerden as *tovenaars* ('wizards'), and Squatriti as 'parasitic dependants': F.A. Wright (ed. and trans.), *The Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (London, 1930), p. 268; P.C. van der Eerden, 'Liudprand van Cremona. Onwil en onvermogen', in M. Mostert, R.E. Künzel, A. Demyttenaere (eds), *Middeleeuwse cultuur: verscheidenheid, spanning en verandering* (Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 45–58; P. Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, DC, 2007), p. 272.

⁷⁶ Liudprand, *Relatio*, 55, p. 205: 'A Veneticis et Amelfitanis institoribus'.

⁷⁷ A.O. Citarella, 'The Relations of Amalfi with the Arab World before the Crusades', *Speculum*, 42.2 (1967): pp. 299–312, esp. 301–02; 'Patterns in Medieval Trade: The Commerce of Amalfi before the Crusades', *Journal of Economic History*, 28.4 (1968): pp. 531–55, esp. 533. Desiderius acquired his garments at Amalfi, whereas laymen tended to purchase them in Rome or Lombardia.

⁷⁸ Amatus, 3.12, p. 127.

⁷⁹ Wilmans (ed.), *Guillemi Apuliensis, Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*, p. 239; Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande*, vol. 1, p. xxxix; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 126–7; N. Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity 911–1154* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 72–4. Essential studies of William's poem are Mathieu, in *William of Apulia*, esp. pp. 1–96; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 123–42; Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, pp. 106–44.

⁸⁰ William of Apulia, *La Geste De Robert Guiscard*, 1.13–16, pp. 98–100: '... Ibi quendam conspicientes / More virum Graeco vestitum, nomine Melum, / Exulis ignotam vestem capitique ligato / Insolitos mitrae mirantur adesse rotatus'.

⁸¹ I deal with this issue and others relating to William's portrayal of the empire in 'The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*: A 'Byzantine' History?', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011): pp. 162–79.

⁸² e.g. J.J. Norwich, *The Normans in Sicily* (London, 1992), p. 9: 'They found him [Meles] unprepossessing, and his clothes frankly effeminate; but they listened to his story'; Wolf, *Making History*, p. 129, and p. 141, n. 55: 'The Greeks were effeminate ... and they dressed funny [i.e. Meles]'; E. Johnson, 'Normandy and Norman Identity in Southern Italian Chronicles', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 27 (2005): pp. 85–100, esp. 90: 'this dress [Meles] is linked to Greek weakness'. Johnson does, however, note that William's poem has positive things to say about Byzantine *virtus*, an admission that is rarely present in the scholarship (see Brown, 'The *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*', esp. pp. 175–8).

⁸³ Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii*, 2.43, p. 51: 'mirifice graeco more praeparatum'.

⁸⁴ For a comparison between the coinage of Isaac I Komnenos and King William I, see K.N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Constantinople. The West and Byzantium, 962–1204: Cultural and Political Relations* (Leiden; Boston; Cologne, 1996), p. 142 and figs 8a–b. Guiscard's coin, struck at Salerno, is featured on the title page of Mathieu's edition of William's *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi*.

⁸⁵ Cassiodorus, *Variarum* (ed.) T. Mommsen, MGH AA, 12 (Berlin, 1894), 5.40, p. 167. For perceptions of the eastern empire in Italy during this period, see P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 119–20, p. 180, p. 199.

⁸⁶ Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni*, (ed.) H. Haefele, MGH SRGN, 12 (Berlin, 1959), 2.6, p. 55.

⁸⁷ Thietmar, *Chronicon*, (ed.) R. Holtzmann, MGH SRGN, 9 (Berlin, 1935), 2.15, p. 55; cf. Wipo, *Gesta Chuonradi imperatoris*, (ed.) H. Bresslau, MGH SSRGius, 61 (Hannover–Leipzig, 1915), 17, p. 37. In Wipo's account, Conrad II achieved success 'against the cunning of the Greeks' ('adversus Graecorum versutias').

⁸⁸ Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni*, 2.6, p. 55.

⁸⁹ Amatus, 1.15, p. 20: 'li Grex, molt de foiz, per maliciouz argument et o subtil tradement avoient usance de veinchere lor anemis'; cf. Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii*, 2.29, p. 40: 'Graeci vero, semper genus perfidissimum'.

⁹⁰ Arnulf, *Liber Gestorum Recentium*, (ed.) C. Zey, MGH SRGSius, 67 (Hannover, 1994), 1.11, p. 133: 'Romani decus imperii astute in Grecos transfere temptasset'.

⁹¹ Arnulf, *Liber Gestorum Recentium*, 1.17, p. 141: 'atrociores facti Grecis, Saracenis ferociore'.

⁹² E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (ed.) D. Womersley, vol. 3 (London; repr. 1994), 56, p. 514.

Chapter 3

‘Till Death Do Us Part?': Family Life in Byzantine Monasteries

Lynda Garland

Despite the fact that those who devoted themselves to the ascetic life were supposed in so doing to renounce all commitments to their families, including their spouse, parents and children,¹ this was frequently not the case in Byzantium. In many cases the opportunity of continuing links with family members constituted an important factor in the choice of a monastic life, especially for women, with the most significant and closest relationship in this regard being that between mother and daughter. It was not uncommon that women who took monastic vows ended their lives in the company of their nearest female relatives and in foundations especially created to support and protect the interests of family members. The life of an aristocratic woman could therefore consist of three separate stages: childhood, spent primarily with female family members in the ‘women’s quarters’ with little contact with males outside family members, married life with a husband and children of both sexes, and retirement to a monastic institution when they would return to the society of their mothers, aunts, daughters and sisters. The empress Theodora Palaiologina, widow of Michael VIII Palaiologos, proclaimed in the *typikon* for her convent of Lips that ‘monastic law makes different provisions, separating [nuns] completely from their parents, and enjoining renunciation *even* of their children, let alone their siblings or other relatives or friends and acquaintances of long standing’,² and the emphasis on the importance of children, especially daughters, is significant. Theodora’s monastic rule, like those of other women founders of monastic institutions, shows a clear expectation of continued contact with family members in her institution and takes particular care to detail the privileged conditions for those imperial women who chose to join their relatives there.

Women’s monastic institutions are clearly under-represented in the Byzantine sources, with mention of only some 77 institutions for women as opposed to 270 institutions for men, while of the 40 surviving monastic *typika* (foundation documents) only five were written by women and only six for women’s institutions.³ Talbot also

notes, in the context of the under-recording of women in our sources, that only 4 per cent of the members of religious communities listed in the *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaeiologenzeit* are female.⁴ Obviously female communities seldom had the same social and political visibility as those for men and this lack of prominence is reinforced by the fact that, whether founded for men or for women, Byzantine monasteries were invariably founded on a small 'family sized' scale, with the minimum number of inmates in an institution varying from three (Justinian; Leo VI) to 8–10 (Basil II). In general nuns or monks in a particular institution numbered between 8 and 20 and could even be as low as two.⁵ Institutions like Stoudion in its heyday, with hundreds of monks under its control, were the exception and a short-lived phenomenon: before Theodore of Stoudios became its abbot in 799 the foundation only comprised 12 resident monks.⁶ Monastic institutions, whether for men or women, were frequently established by families in the interests of their own members and clearly modelled on family groupings, with the endowments sufficient to support a small number of residents, such as family members and their connections. Such foundations for women served as family trusts, providing for the needs of current and future generations of the family, as well as playing an extremely important role as a site for family burials and providing for the commemoration of relatives.⁷ Even when monasteries were not intended for blood relatives, a similarly homogeneous group could be targeted as the potential inhabitants and the prospective number of residents was always small. In the late eleventh century Michael Attaleiates, who wished to recruit monks from his former public servant colleagues ('recreating Byzantine bureaucracy in a monastic setting'),⁸ planned for seven monks in his foundation, though in fact he was only able to attract five. Similarly Gregory Pakourianos restricted the monks at his monastery at Petritzos to 50 of his Georgian countrymen (no Greeks were to be admitted), with his own relatives having preference, and the institution was to serve as a memorial to himself and his brother Aspasio.⁹

As opposed to some of the more radical heroes of hagiography who took extreme measures to escape from their families in their pursuit of the ascetic life,¹⁰ traditionally girls or widows had not even had to leave home in order to become nuns, and were able to lead an ascetic life while remaining with their family. In the early ninth century Theodore the Stoudite corresponded with a certain nun Anna who lived at home with her child.¹¹ And when female monastic institutions were established, they were generally situated on family estates in or near Constantinople or other cities and far from the remote sites often chosen for male monasteries. Hagiographic fictional romances which

describe girls and women dressing as eunuchs in order to be able to enter a male institution are just that: fictional.¹² Women and their institutions were expected to be settled in a civilised region, preferably close to a town and family connections and indeed often on family estates.¹³ This in itself ensured that the monastic foundation remained connected with the family that established it. Furthermore the practice of setting up double monasteries, encouraged by St Basil and popular in early Byzantium, never entirely died out, though forbidden by Justinian, the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 and the ninth- and eleventh-century patriarchs Nikephoros and Alexios the Stoudite. In fact this practice was not only difficult to eradicate but actually made a come-back in the Palaiologan era to provide for males and females of the same family who wished to lead a monastic life in relative contiguity, sharing communal resources and religious services.¹⁴ Of course not all such institutions were successful and one founded by the Patriarch Athanasios had to be later disbanded by his successor Neilos in 1383 as the men and women were not cooperating.¹⁵ Another example of such a foundation is that established c.1310 by the widowed princess Irene Choumnaina, who at the age of 16 after her husband's death not only founded such a double community with herself at its head, but persuaded both her parents to join her there, with her father – the erstwhile politician Nikephoros Choumnos – coming across to her side of the institution to visit her every weekend.¹⁶

Family relationships played an important role in the choice of an institution and, as far as women were concerned, one of the primary incentives in the decision was to join a mother, aunt or other female relative who had already taken vows.¹⁷ In the fifth century St Elizabeth 'the Wonderworker' is said to have joined the convent of St George in Constantinople where her father's sister was the abbess; in due course Elizabeth herself became the superior.¹⁸ Similarly Theopiste, daughter of the ninth-century saint Theodora of Thessaloniki, is described at the age of six as joining a convent of which her aunt Aikaterina was the superior, while Theodora herself at her husband's death joined the convent of St Stephen's headed by yet another relative and had Theopiste transferred to the same institution. Their hagiographer records that, because Theodora's love for her daughter was displayed too openly, the abbess decreed that they had to work in the same cell, even working on the same loom and grinding grain at the same mill, without speaking to each other, – a state of affairs said to have lasted for 15 years. Theopiste then became abbess in her turn and was her mother's superior for a further 24 years: the mother and daughter spent 39 years together in close proximity.¹⁹ Indeed women's monasteries could house several generations of

women from the same family, with multiple family members residing at the convent of Bebaia Elpis, including the founder's daughter and granddaughter, while many imperial princesses, after marriages outside Byzantium, returned to family monasteries in Constantinople where they joined their mother or other female relatives.²⁰ Theodora Synadene, founder of Bebaia Elpis, celebrates in adulatory terms the fact that her daughter Euphrosyne resides at Theodora's institution, seeing her presence as one of the main assets she has granted her monastery:

I brought myself [to this convent], and I also brought my only daughter who is good and fine in all respects, the pleasant and charming light of my eyes, my sweetest love, the flame of my heart, my breath and life, the hope of my old age, my refreshment, my comfort, my consolation. With joyful and leaping soul I dedicated her to the Mother of God ... the adornment of all her family ... ²¹

Euphrosyne was only a young girl, but, in contrast to practices in the West, many Byzantine nuns were not unmarried girls, but widows and wives from all levels of society who had family connections with a convent or were wealthy enough to establish their own foundation.²² After their married life many men and women took monastic vows on or not long before their deathbed – in the hope of gaining additional 'brownie points' towards salvation.²³ It was also possible for a husband and wife or an entire family group to take vows simultaneously earlier in their family life, with the members splitting along gender lines to separate institutions and while this is a common motif in hagiography there are also clear historical examples.²⁴ In c.783, under the influence of Theodore of Stoudios' remarkable mother Theoktiste, the whole family took monastic vows. All six males of the family – Theodore's father, his two paternal uncles, Theodore himself, and his two younger brothers – retired simultaneously to the institution at Sakkoudion founded by Theodore's uncle Platon, while Theodore's mother and sister remained in Constantinople, and transformed the family house into a convent. The youngest child Euthymios, who was only nine years of age and objected to the decision, was forced on board the boat by his mother. While Theoktiste remained in correspondence with Theodore over the next 30 years, only one meeting between the two is documented: nothing further is heard of his sister or of the fate of the institution, and how long it survived or whether the sister in the course of time became its superior is unknown.²⁵ The family of Gregory Palamas took a similar decision to separate when Gregory reached the age of 20 in 1316: Gregory and his two brothers went to Mt Athos, while his mother and two of his sisters joined a convent in Constantinople.²⁶

Married couples could agree to separate and depart to monastic institutions for various reasons: it might be because their children had grown up and left home; because of childlessness; or following the death of a child. For women, the death of a child or children appears to have been a primary incentive to turning to monastic life, even when other children were still living: the *typikon* of Lips considers ‘the death of children’ as one of the ‘terrible things in the world’ and allows a woman in this circumstance to be tonsured early, i.e., within six months of entry into the convent.²⁷ The loss of a child automatically qualified a mother for the monastic life and was expected to produce an aversion towards worldly concerns. Both parents could be similarly affected and one of the most poignant descriptions in Byzantine literature is that of Michael Psellos on the death of his young daughter Styliane.²⁸ One of Psellos’ own sisters had died early and, according to his eulogy of his mother, his parents decided to retire to monasteries after her death in childbirth, even though their other two children were still living; the sister was buried in the institution which Theodote intended to join.²⁹ The retirement of an only child to a monastery could have the same effect: when Irene Choumnaina founded her double institution of Philanthropos Soter (Irene’s only sibling was already a nun), her parents decided to join her there, one in each half of her foundation.³⁰ It was also possible for a couple to be equally tired of marriage in particular and life in general: in 1400 Ignatios Theologites and Makrina ‘chose to adopt the monastic habit, in the belief that that life in this world was a useless tumult and veritable hell’. In this case Ignatios restored a convent for his wife and other nuns, and settled nearby at the monastery of St Sampson where he was joined by two friends.³¹ Such separations were encouraged by the church, and the fact that Byzantine ecclesiastical authorities saw no problem with spouses separating for spiritual reasons is shown in the regulations for clergy that they could not accept promotion to a bishopric unless their wives ‘voluntarily’ entered a monastery, which had to be at a distant remove from the husband’s diocese. Indeed Balsamon’s commentary on this canon states his belief that in deciding to marry a priest a woman must have expected this eventuality, and that through her marriage she had signalled her commitment to monastic life should her husband be raised to the rank of bishop.³²

While a husband’s approval was needed before a wife could enter a monastery,³³ monasteries for women served numerous functions in Byzantine society, catering for those in distress – providing the same amenities as hospitals, orphanages, mental asylums, even prisons for political refugees³⁴ – and for many women retirement to a monastic institution would have been a relief from widowhood and poverty, ill

health or incompatibility in marriage.³⁵ On the other side of the coin, there were women of wealth who established such monastic institutions not so much to provide for the unfortunate, but with the clearly stated aim of setting up a family property trust and private retirement home for themselves and members of their family for generations to come, an investment and insurance for the future where children and grandchildren could retire from the loneliness of widowhood and burden of marital strife, or pursue a desire for the contemplative life. These foundations also served as a central burial place for deceased members of the family and ensured their commemoration, while the prayers of the nuns worked towards the salvation of the soul of the founder and her relatives. So important were these considerations that women often planned for their 'retirement' well in advance and for those who were anticipating such a life-change after the death of their spouse, clearly such institutions were not a matter of dread or abhorrence, whatever the degree to which these women might later lament the loss of their husband. In fact *typika* written for women's foundations make clear that the women who endowed them in the expectation of retiring there were creating for themselves an environment which was intended not only to protect them from everything from poverty to awkward political situations, but also which suited the lifestyle and interests of themselves and future female members of their family. Theodora Synadene, in bringing her young daughter Euphrosyne into her foundation, sees it as receiving her like a welcoming harbour, ensuring her escape from the storms and waves of this world.³⁶

Between 1110 and c.1310 five imperial women founded convents in Constantinople for the benefit of themselves and their relatives. In each case the founder laid down very specific regulations for the lifestyle and occupations of the 'ordinary' nuns and instructions as to the treatment and privileges to be accorded to family members. These five *typika* share very specific characteristics: the founders are lay, and not nuns; while the lifestyle is to be cenobitic, there is clearly preferential treatment of family members and not a 'level playing-field' for all inmates; and there is an emphasis on the preservation of property, the maintenance of family ties, and the importance of the commemoration of deceased family members.³⁷ In each case the size of the institution was predetermined as stated by Theodora Synadene in her *typikon*:

Therefore the whole group of nuns should number three times ten, and they should be 30 in all. This number should never be exceeded nor diminished and reduced. For this number is sufficient for the demands of a cenobitic community, and does not require any increase which would be superfluous and useless.³⁸

In each case the details laid down are so specific that it should be assumed that the *typikon* represented the detailed wishes and priorities of the founder, even if not written with her own pen, and while Theodora Palaiologina appears to have used a ghost-writer for the *typikon* of Lips the others may well have been the work of the founders themselves: Morrisson even voices the intriguing suggestion that Anna Komnene herself may have played a role in the authorship of her mother's *typikon*.³⁹

1. Theotokos Kecharitomene

The earliest of these five *typika*, that of Irene Doukaina for her convent dedicated to the Theotokos Kecharitomene ('Full of Grace'), was written c.AD 1110–16, prior to the death of her husband Alexios I Komnenos in 1118.⁴⁰ It was aligned with, but independent from, an adjoining male monastery dedicated to Christ by Irene, but shared a common water system. Irene probably retired there on her husband's death, after her unsuccessful attempt to supplant her son John with her daughter Anna Komnene and son-in-law Nikephoros Bryennios, and died there probably in 1123. She was joined by her daughter Anna after the death of Bryennios c.1136 and it was at Kecharitomene that Anna wrote the *Alexiad*. For her foundation Irene made provision for 24 nuns plus a superior, though she did allow that, should there be additional endowment to cover any expansion, the number of nuns could increase to 30 or 40 or indeed, if it were necessary, decrease to a minimum of two: essentially she envisages the same tight-knit community as Theodora Synadene. At the same time Irene put a smaller establishment with only four nuns under the jurisdiction of the larger foundation. The original 24 were to consist of 18 'choir' nuns and six 'working' nuns, plus the superior, two girls being raised in the convent, and six assistants, perhaps to act in a menial capacity for the nuns from the imperial and aristocratic family.⁴¹

2. Constantine Lips

Theodora Palaiologina, widow of Michael VIII Palaiologos, founded two similar institutions, apparently relying, if not on the *typikon* of Kecharitomene, which itself owed much to the Evergetis reform tradition, at least on a later foundation document which had been modelled on it: the importance of the Kecharitomene *typikon* in the development of other women's foundations can be seen from the fact that Philanthropos Soter's *typikon* was also clearly influenced by it.⁴²

The Constantine Lips monastery, restored and refounded by Theodora between 1294 and 1301, together with an adjoining church for family burials and the establishment of a 12-bed hospital for women which was to be under the control of the convent's superior and steward,⁴³ was slightly larger than Kecharitomene but still not a populous establishment. Identified with the modern Fenari Isa Camii, the *tyikon* allowed for 50 nuns in total in the institution, 30 to serve in the choir and 20 for household duties. Theodora retired there herself, dying in 1303.

3. Anagyroi

During the same period, Theodora also restored the Anagyroi monastery as a convent. It was a separate establishment, though its officials were to cooperate with those of Lips, the two establishments being 'separate in unity' with similar officials and regulations, and the *tyikon* of Anagyroi provided for 30 nuns, 18 for the choir and 12 for household work, the same proportions as at Lips: 60 per cent choir nuns, 40 per cent workers.⁴⁴

4. Theotokos Bebaia Elpis

The next all-female institution to be founded was that of the Theotokos Bebaia Elpis ('Sure Hope'), founded by Theodora Synadene, niece of Michael VIII Palaiologos and widow of John Angelos Doukas Synadenos, who in her *tyikon* of c.1300 provided for 30 nuns, a number later increased by her daughter to 50; this daughter Euphrosyne later added her own *tyikon* to the original document.⁴⁵ These nuns were also divided into choir sisters and workers, but the relative proportions of these are not clear.

5. Christ Philanthropos Soter

The final institution was founded c.1310 by Irene Choumnaina Palaiologina, daughter of the minister Nikephoros Choumnos and widow of despot John Palaiologos, when she was only 16 years of age. She set up the double institution of Christ Philanthropos Soter, where she was joined by both her parents: Nikephoros died there in 1327 and his wife some years later in Irene's arms.⁴⁶ Little of the *tyikon* has survived, but, while Gregoras mentions that the convent held 100

nuns (an extensive establishment), the *typikon* does provide for as few as two, and we only know five by name, mentioned in letters to the abbess by her spiritual adviser Theoleptos.⁴⁷ It appears, unusually, that all nuns participated in both 'common activities' and 'spiritual labour' – 'since thereby they behave like nuns and not like businesswomen and even worse than laymen' and that Irene did not divide them into 'choir' and 'working' sisters (Philanthropos 2).

These five *typika* can be compared with a sixth written for a community of women (the only other one extant for a convent), which was composed in 1400 by Neilos Damilas for his foundation at Baionaia in Crete, established alongside a neighbouring monastery. The nuns were to spend much of their time in handicraft for retail sale as well as in making habits for the monks, who in return manufactured habits and shoes for the nuns. There appears to have been no distinction between choir nuns and workers, and all the nuns except for the gatekeepers were expected to help with duties in the garden and vineyard.⁴⁸

Before the first nun even entered the convent, the founders laid their personal stamp upon the institution through the writing of the *typikon*: their voice is heard in the glorification of their family, their vision for the convent, and the organisational details that they deemed necessary in order to regulate the liturgical practices, governance of the institution and conduct of its members. In the same way as the *typika* of laymen act as justification for their careers, those written by imperial women celebrate their status and the imperial rank of which they are justly proud:⁴⁹ it would be unrealistic to expect from these women an establishment which celebrated the equality of all its inmates. As well as clearly articulating their own imperial status the founders are well aware of the control this gives them over their foundation, with the explicit expectation that they, and to a lesser extent other members of their family, will be at the summit of a hierarchy.⁵⁰ Irene Doukaina states at the commencement of her *typikon* that the convent is to be 'administered and managed in whatever manner I myself wish while I am preserved in this life' and reserves to herself the right to appoint the superior and steward, while family members have an automatic right of entry. Similarly Theodora Palaiologina states that she is 'permitted to decree my wishes in my own affairs, especially since I happen to be a *despoina* [empress] by the mercy of my all-powerful God'.⁵¹ There is no expectation that all the residents in the institution are to be treated equally. Irene Choumnaina retained her title of *basilissa*, and complained to her adviser Theoleptos that she was unable to attend family funerals as she did not possess a suitable retinue or equipage, while she even irritated the patriarch by her superciliousness.⁵² The most

authoritarian, however, is Theodora Synadene, who imposed punishments of numerous genuflections, standing vigils, fasts and a water-only diet, plus other punishments thought appropriate by the superior for disobedient nuns, and she specifically lays down in her *typikon* that ‘everything that is ordered by the superior, even if it seems reprehensible, is completely free from condemnation as being irreproachable’. Her daughter Euphrosyne is to be ‘mistress and heir of this convent and all my property’, and Euphrosyne herself refers to the institution as ‘her ancestral convent’.⁵³ Despite the perception that monasteries in Byzantium shared an egalitarian and communal lifestyle this was certainly not true of the five establishments under discussion.⁵⁴

Not only did the writing of the *typikon* give these founders a chance for autobiographical self-expression, but each founder also viewed the *typikon* itself as one of the greatest gifts which she had granted to her convent and its nuns: there is pride both in the foundation itself and in the document which regulated it. The statements which celebrate these women’s rank and status would have been deliberately crafted in the expectation that the audience/readership of the *typikon* would have included its author’s descendents and other relatives who had joined the institution. One of the main priorities addressed in the *typikon* is the commemoration of past, present and future family members, and the *typikon* of Bebaia Elpis highlights the importance of the founder’s family by including 12 folios with portraits of Theodora Synadene and her husband, her parents, her three children, and four granddaughters and their husbands. Two of these depict Theodora Synadene in her imperial regalia and her nun’s habit respectively, and the *typikon* gives detailed information about her family both by birth and by marriage, emphasising the rank of her parents (‘the most fortunate *sebastokrator* lord Constantine Komnenos Palaiologos Doukas Angelos, who took the monastic name of Kallinikos, and my holy mother, Branaina Komnene Laskarina Kantakouzene Palaiologina ...’) and the fact that she was the niece of the emperor and wife of the great *stratopedarches*.⁵⁵ Except for those rare women such as Anna Komnene and Theodora Raoulaina who were authors in their own right, this was perhaps the first and only chance apart from letter-writing that literate upper-class women had to promote their self-identity and express themselves and their ideals at length.

Founders laid down that the *typikon* be read aloud to the nuns on a regular basis, as well as studied by the inmates of the convent on an equal footing with the Scriptures and the *Lives* of female saints. Irene Doukaina highlighted the importance of her *typikon* with the instruction that it be read aloud to the nuns on the first day of each month, ‘so that through continuous reading the instructions laid down

might be especially permanent and indelible', and ensured the document's survival through the making of three separate copies, one placed in St Sophia, one in the sacristy of Kecharitomene and one lodged with the convent's protectress.⁵⁶ 'It is my wish and command', stated Theodora Palaiologina to the nuns of Lips, 'that the *typikon* be read aloud at least three times a year, beginning each time on a feast day', while the nuns are to proclaim 'Eternal be the memory of the founders' at the conclusion of each reading;⁵⁷ the reading of the *typikon* in its entirety would have lasted many mealtimes. Their *typikon* is to be treated by the nuns of Bebaia Elpis as their most precious private reading – 'the finest and most valuable of [the] possessions' granted them by their founder and more valuable than 'great wealth and any other rich inheritance'; it is also to be read publicly in the refectory each month to ensure that the nuns remember their duties and thus fulfil the founder's 'divine purpose'.⁵⁸

The *typika* are not the only gendered reading enjoined upon the nuns: the reading of the *Lives* of female saints also reinforced the gendered ideology within these institutions.⁵⁹ At Bebaia Elpis the nuns, and especially the superior, are to treat the lives of female saints as role-models.⁶⁰ The superior is urged to study these lives so that her conduct, modelled on that of the saints, will be an example to her nuns, and Theodora instructs them that they should emulate 'the heroic conduct and wondrous lives of these holy women' who so successfully mocked and crushed satanic forces as if they were 'pitiable sparrows'. Similarly Irene Choumnaina was encouraged by her spiritual adviser Theoleptos to read saints' *Lives*, and he assumed she would follow his suggestion.⁶¹

These nuns, both choir and workers, were thus exposed during mealtimes to texts which focused on the female virtues, and reading, whether privately or aloud in smaller groups, was expected to be a normal activity for the literate nuns, who were encouraged to study and read.⁶² This avidity for reading should not be surprising considering that imperial and aristocratic women had played an important role as literary patrons in bringing together circles of distinguished literati and in commissioning luxury codices. The convents did not act as centres for the copying of manuscripts, although lay and monastic women have been identified as scribes, one of these, Irene daughter of Theodore Hagiopetrites, as part of a father-daughter team.⁶³ But imperial women could enjoy reading an eclectic selection of authors: according to Irene Doukaina's daughter her mother loved difficult theological writings, such as those of Maximos Confessor, while the intellectual eminence and authorship of Theodora Raoulaina, another niece of Michael VIII Palaiologos, is well documented. Much of her scholarship took place at the convent of St

Andrew in Kriasi after her second husband's death.⁶⁴ Provisions were made for those who could not read on their own or whose hands were occupied: at Kecharitomene one nun is always to read while the others are working in the dormitory at their manual tasks (such as embroidery), for their spiritual improvement and to prevent conversation, while there is always to be reading at mealtimes.⁶⁵ Theodora Palaiologina instructs that at mealtimes the nuns at Lips must listen attentively as one of the nuns reads aloud from whatever text the *ecclesiarchissa* (the official in charge of music and liturgy) has selected, while at Bebaia Elpis the nuns must silently listen to reading at meals, with, as we have seen, the *typikon* a frequently chosen text.⁶⁶ Literate nuns were also urged to read quietly (as well as to pray and recite the psalter) during their free time in their cells. Similarly Irene Choumnaina, while her Greek may not have been flawless,⁶⁷ prescribed reading and prayer in their cells as one of the duties expected of all her nuns.

None of the five Constantinopolitan *typika* for women mentions a library, but reading is assumed to be so engrossing an activity that we have to postulate a collection of books in each, perhaps similar to that listed by Neilos Damilas for his Cretan convent, as well as books personally owned by nuns. In his institution Neilos was clearly concerned that due care be taken with the convent's library, forbidding the superior to lend books outside the convent in case they were damaged, and instructing her not to leave her own personal books to outsiders on her death but to the convent. One of her most urgent duties was to teach the other nuns to read, 'a fine and admirable deed', and the nuns were instructed to read aloud at least twice a night, 'for prayer and reading are like two eyes'.⁶⁸ The founders may have stocked the convents' libraries themselves: Theodora Palaiologina herself commissioned literary works, including a translation into Greek of a Persian treatise on geometry, as well as (unspecified) liturgical works, presumably for her monastic establishments, and would certainly have ensured that her nuns had sufficient reading materials for private and public instruction. We know that convent libraries generally contained copies of the Scriptures and treatises on monastic life and Theodora may herself have been responsible for a splendid group of 15 scriptural and liturgical illuminated manuscripts commissioned at this period.⁶⁹ The library at Neilos Damilas' foundation at Baionaia contained 41 volumes, including a copy of the gospels in his own writing, a *typikon* (presumably the one for this institution), *Menaia*, a psalter, the book of Job (the only book from the Old Testament) and volumes of St Basil, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, Maximos Confessor, Anastasios of Sinai, Matthew Blastares, Gregory Palamas, and the

Scala Paradisi of John Klimakos from which the *typonikon* frequently quotes. The nuns are also exhorted to read ‘constantly and insatiably’ the convent’s volumes of *Maximos*.⁷⁰

Despite their authoritarian and almost arrogant exposition of their own merits and status, the founders pay ‘lip service’ to stereotypes of themselves and their nuns as ‘weak women’, sinners, and in need of protection as a result of their sex. Interestingly positive characteristics, however greatly possessed by these imperial women, are masculinised. Theodora Palaiologina philosophises that as ‘female nature is weak’ the rules about the visits of relatives have had to be ‘softened’ somewhat to cater for this deficiency; elsewhere she expresses her view that women need protection ‘inasmuch as they are accustomed to staying at home and the silence which is most appropriate to [them]’. The Bebaia Elpis *typonikon* states that ‘the frail nature of women requires the *ephoreia* (protection) and guardianship of men’ to protect the nuns from difficulties and ‘troublesome and bothersome people’.⁷¹ But beyond this the founders make frequent use of gendered imagery in reference to childbirth, betrothal, love and marriage, reflecting the concept of the convent as a quasi-family grouping. Irene Doukaina praises the Theotokos for making her not just a mother, but a maternal and paternal grandmother, and the superior of her foundation is to maintain a motherly affection towards her charges by caring, supporting, instructing, advising, teaching, comforting, healing and encouraging them, while they in turn must revere her as a mother. Theodora Palaiologina instructs her nuns as a mother (which she then corrects as a *despoina* when she recalls her rank), reminding them that whatever their ages they must be as devoted to the superior as if she were their mother, and addressing the body of nuns as her ‘daughters, mothers and sisters – for I will call you each by the name your age assigns you’. Theodora Synadene, the devoted mother of Euphrosyne, ‘conceived in the womb of my heart and gave birth to this truly good and holy and divine love and desire’ in founding her convent. The superior is to love the nuns as if they were her own children and the nuns are instructed that she will ‘substitute for your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters, your other relatives and acquaintances and friends ...’. For her part she must watch over the nuns as a ‘true mother looks after her own daughters, and cares for them like her own limbs and organs’.⁷²

The choir nuns, who were clearly literate, played a managerial role in their convents and undertook numerous duties, as well as handicraft, prayer and reading. On a small scale the institutions replicated the structure and occupations of aristocratic households, with, however, the difference that selected women were given important and specialised administrative roles which needed

considerable expertise and managerial skill. The choir nuns would also have been engaged in the education of any young girls in the institution as novices, like the two being brought up at Kecharitomene, to enable them to read and perform their duties as choir nuns.⁷³ The ‘workers’ in contrast would have performed the manual labour in the household and garden as well as handiwork, which all nuns seems to have engaged in, such as spinning, weaving and embroidery, which was used by the nuns themselves or sold for the institution’s profit. The manual nuns may also have served at table, the exception to this division of labour being at Philanthropos Soter where the manual work was shared between all the nuns including Irene herself, while at Bebaia Elpis each nun had to wash her own clothes, receiving one litre of *nitra* each month in order to do so.⁷⁴

The steward at the early twelfth-century foundation of Kecharitomene had to be a eunuch, but the 24 choir nuns filled the following positions: sacristan in charge of the sacred vessels, cloths and candle wax (she was also the archivist); leader of the choir nuns (the *ecclesiarchissa*) and her assistant in charge of behaviour in the church and its decoration; food-buyer and wine-pourer (both of whom had to keep detailed records); provisioner in charge of receiving and storing crops and foodstuffs; cellarer; refectorian in charge of serving food and conduct at meals; a disciplinary official; two managers who distributed materials for handicraft and who took charge of the finished products; two treasurers; two storeroom officials in charge of items such as blankets and pillows; and an elderly gatekeeper – more than half the choir nuns had an official position.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Irene Doukaina was unable to believe that an appropriate superior could not be found from among the existing choir nuns, and only in the case of there being just one suitable nominee would another convent be approached for an alternative contender.⁷⁶ Similarly officials at Lips comprised a male salaried steward; a sacristan and cellarer (in charge of both meals and wine), both with two assistants; an *ecclesiarchissa*; a treasurer; and a gatekeeper.⁷⁷ At Bebaia Elpis, an institution of the same size, nuns filled the roles of *ecclesiarchissa*, steward, cellarer (assisted by a cook, baker and server), storeroom manager, disciplinary official, and gatekeeper, all of whom were chosen by voting, not by direct appointment by the superior. It is significant in this case that the steward had to be a nun ‘who had gained great experience in practical affairs’ and she was allowed to leave the convent to visit its properties and had to keep records of all revenues and production, as well as purchasing provisions not provided by the convent’s estates, and managing production within the convent itself.⁷⁸ Various qualifications and forms of expertise are expected

from amongst the nuns: the steward is to be 'elderly', if not in years then in wisdom and character, with a great deal of practical experience and capable of hard work and commitment so that the convent will not 'fall into decline or deterioration through poor and improper management'. The *ecclesiarchissa*, on the other hand, as well as being 'wise' and 'pious' and familiar with the liturgy so that nothing will be omitted or out of place, has to be able to sing and chant in tune and 'with skill' (implying musical training) and inspire all the choir sisters to emulate her performance. She is also responsible for assigning places in the choir and for the general care of the church, as well as for educating young nuns in chanting and reading, and for ensuring orderly behaviour (i.e., no quarrelling, noise, chatting or whispering during services).⁷⁹

The *ecclesiarchissa* was therefore the 'professional', experienced musician of the establishment and, at Bebaia Elpis at least, organised everything relating to services in the church, including the direction of the liturgy. There were high musical expectations of the choir nuns, with the music seen as assisting their thoughts to ascend beautifully to a conception of God: the singing of hymns was seen as a spiritual activity just like prayer, and the monastic choir below was thought to harmonise with the heavenly choir, thus raising humankind towards the angels – an image perpetuated among others by St Basil.⁸⁰ The importance of the choir should not be understated: no professional psalm-singers were allowed in these all-female institutions, except at Lips when the emperor, Theodora's son Andronikos II, was in attendance,⁸¹ and the music was entirely in the hands of the nuns themselves, who were able to decide on their own liturgical preferences: the services conducted, lighting arrangements, music, ritual and prayers. The position of *ecclesiarchissa* was especially important because the greater proportion of nuns in these institutions belonged to the choir rather than being working nuns, and the workers at Bebaia Elpis are instructed to hasten to the liturgy when they first hear the singing, 'like thirsty harts towards pure and fresh flowing streams', singing psalm verses on their way. Those who were unable to read were to learn by listening to the liturgy.⁸² The complexity of the role of musical director was enhanced by the fact that the choir nuns would not often have sung as a single group, but would generally have been divided into two antiphonal halves, and there may have been subsidiary smaller groups to perform at different services during the day or on specific festival occasions.⁸³ Just as earlier female hymnographers, in particular Kassia, Theodosia and Thekla, were writing for their nuns from a female perspective,⁸⁴ and were clearly skilled musicians who composed and directed chants and hymns for their community,⁸⁵ we should assume that our

ecclesiarchissai had considerable knowledge and experience of musical theory and performance.

The choir nuns – although their time was totally devoted to the services in the establishment's church, and to fasts, vigils, prayer, chanting and genuflections – still had a fairly physical regime: at Kecharitomene the customary genuflections following prayer are itemised by Irene Doukaina in detail: a genuflection consisted of 15 prostrations, the first three being performed slowly enough so that while standing up and bending the knees the nun had the time to say, 'God, be merciful to me the sinner' three times, while standing with her hands stretched out. Then, kneeling with her head on the ground, she should say three times, 'I have sinned against Thee, Lord, forgive me'. The remaining 12 genuflections were to be performed more quickly, so that each nun could say the words once when kneeling and once when standing (not three times). Weaker nuns were allowed the use of a low support and the whole choir was orchestrated by the *ecclesiarchissa* so that the nuns genuflected in time with each other.⁸⁶

Just as the nuns had some measure of decision over the choice and performance of church music, so the decorations of the convent and its church could be chosen to suit women's gendered needs and ritual practices. The north aisle, a section of a church sometimes reserved for women, frequently depicted female saints and rituals of importance to women (such as birth, baptism, wedding, sickness, healing, death and the mourning and commemoration of the deceased), and the depictions of female saints acted there for women as 'visual counterparts, personal intercessors, and potential surrogates'.⁸⁷ Both men and women preferred art which was specifically appropriate to their gender, and when the monastery of Maroules in Constantinople was changed from a convent to a monastery in 1342 the depictions of female saints were replaced by those of males, showing that there was intentional gendering of church decoration within monastic institutions.⁸⁸ The inlaid portrait of the imperial saint Eudokia, perhaps the third wife of Leo VI, at the Lips monastery was, for example, entirely suited as a role model for an imperial foundation for women.⁸⁹ The intentional gendering of church decoration would have been particularly important in the context of a cloister designed by women for women. Interestingly Gerstel comments that female saints were seldom found within the decorative programs of male monasteries (after all most *typika* prohibited the entrance of women into male monasteries except under the most exceptional of circumstances: visiting the grave of a relative, commemorating a feast day, or making a pilgrimage to a shrine), while the decoration and icons of female monasteries would have portrayed the saints of most importance to women.⁹⁰ The role of

female saints, especially name saints, as intercessors for women was particularly important, while female patrons apparently chose to position the image of their favourite female saint as close to the sanctuary as possible and even within it, while the fact that female saints are frequently depicted in spaces proximate to the dead suggests the hope that they would engage in continual commemoration of and intercession on behalf of the deceased.⁹¹

The *typika* particularly emphasise the importance of the commemoration of the deceased, which was primarily the women's role in any family, and prescribe services celebrating the anniversary of the death of specific family members, when alms and *kollyba* were distributed.⁹² Where possible relatives of the founder are to be buried in churches or *mausolea* attached to the institution. At Kecharitomene memorial services are to be held along with liturgical offerings for Irene Doukaina's relatives, both living and deceased. Irene provides that any family members who had taken monastic vows might be buried in the *exonarthex* of the church, and Theodora Palaiologina added the church of the *Prodromos* to her institution at Lips specifically to serve as a mausoleum for members of her family, with specific mention of tombs for her deceased daughter, herself, her mother, and her son Andronikos II (if he chose to be buried there, which he was in 1332) with eucharistic offerings to be made for herself, her ancestors, her mother, Andronikos and his wife, and her other children, along with annual commemorations for her family. The nuns are also instructed to remember her in their prayers. Similar commemorations, but at less expense, were to be carried out at Anagyroi, where the nuns were also to continue the commemorations provided for by the founder of the original institution.⁹³ Theodora Synadene provides the greatest detail in terms of the numerous memorial services for her relatives, with instructions regarding the number of priests, candle-stands, the preparation of *kollyba* and the distribution of bread and wine at the monastery gates. Services are to be held for her parents, husband, daughter and her two sons and daughters-in-law. In an appendix she later added the details of further relatives who had since died, several of whom had specifically left donations of vessels, icons, land or money to the monastery to ensure such commemorations.⁹⁴ Of the 15 relatives whose anniversary is to be commemorated, all took monastic vows before their deaths, including a granddaughter at Bebaia Elpis itself, and it would not be improbable that all the female relatives had joined this family institution prior to their death. Theodora's daughter Euphrosyne had raised the number of nuns to 50, which implies an increasing demand for admission, although it should be noted that Theodora's sister, the *protostratorissa* Glabaina lived not there but in an adjoining convent.⁹⁵

Theodora's daughter-in-law Thomais, her granddaughter Theodora, and her sister Maria are all commemorated. A further granddaughter Anna (Xene) later restored the convent, which was threatening to collapse in several places, while one of Theodora's great-granddaughters, Eugenia Kantakouzene Philanthropene, was a further 'foundress' of the convent and spent her entire fortune paying for further restoration and repair of the church and its bell tower. The author's daughter-in-law also paid for the repair of the convent's cells in exchange for a commemoration of her father. Both Theodora and Euphrosyne urge the nuns not to neglect these commemorative services, whatever the convent's financial position, and they were clearly an important rationale for the foundation. Theodora states that she would have liked a more 'lavish' commemoration for her beloved daughter Euphrosyne, but that Euphrosyne was too modest to accept this.⁹⁶

Founders clearly specify in their *typika* what they themselves have given to their institution. Theodora Palaiologina endowed Lips with estates in and around the capital and near Smyrna, many of these coming from her son Andronikos II and from her mother, Eudokia Angelina. The detailed lists include villages (including one in Macedonia), farms, vineyards, olive groves, mills, gardens, a cattle byre, a fishpond and rental properties, with even the number of olive trees itemised. Several of the estates and houses in Constantinople are specifically said to have been purchased by the empress herself. Certain revenues are dedicated to the upkeep of the women's hospital, under the care of the monastery's superior and steward, with 12 beds, plus a further three for attendants, and provision made for mattresses, blankets and clothes to be distributed along with a generous allowance per patient of wheat, and money for wine, food, wood, oil, salt, flax-seed oil and barley or barley-water.⁹⁷ Theodora Synadene also listed the properties which she donated to her convent, such as villages, vineyards and arable land, while her daughter-in-law Thomais donated a vineyard 'for her spiritual salvation'. She also details the property (half of her ancestral estate, a village, garden, vineyard and houses) which remains under her own control to provide for the maintenance and modest comfort of herself and of her daughter, who in her will can dispose of these as she wishes. Theodora had herself purchased land which she then turned into a vineyard, while her daughter, in adding commemorations to the *typikon*, records that Theodora's great-granddaughter Eugenia cleared a courtyard and turned it into a wheat field valued at 300 *hyperpyra* to pay for her mother's commemoration. In detailing Eugenia's repairs to the church and bell tower, she itemises the *hyperpyra* spent on 'tiles, nails, plaster, skilled labor and other appropriate expenses'.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Why would imperial and aristocratic women have found ‘retirement’ in these institutions an attractive proposition? It has been noted that life within one of these convents would have been very similar to that of women of the upper-classes in Constantinople,⁹⁹ and these institutions replicated many of the functions which took place in a typical family: the nuns continued to spin, weave and embroider, read and pray, and help educate a younger generation, while the men with whom they associated were frequently eunuchs, a class with which these women would have had a close rapport in their days at home. Though ‘holy’, the lifestyle was not too restrictive: while each *typikon* stressed the importance of the cenobitic life and communal living,¹⁰⁰ imperial and noblewomen were permitted to bring their servants with them or to have some assigned to them within the convent. This was clearly not just an imperial prerogative: according to her son Psellos, Theodote, who belonged to the Constantinopolitan upper middle-classes, also had a maidservant assigned to her when she entered her convent.¹⁰¹ The choir nuns and officials of the institution also had the opportunity to continue to employ the administrative and business skills they had developed as mistresses of complex and wealthy households. Furthermore, in their all-female institution, they were able to decide upon and engage in the forms of worship, reading and music which best suited their tastes and interests.

In the expectation that family members will join the convent, the *typika* of Kecharitomene, Lips and Bebaia Elpis clearly articulate that their institutions have been founded to provide for the convenience of their female relatives. While these were naturally able to take monastic vows, it was not necessary for them to become nuns in order to enjoy the privilege of residence at the institution. There were also provisions for the period of the novitiate to be reduced or done away with for pious women and ‘familiar and important personages so that it is known what sort of people they were in their lives’. While the cenobitic regime is laid down with strict equality in terms of manual labour, handicraft, food, clothing and sleeping quarters, including proscriptions against secret eating and drinking, family members are given special privileges if they choose to make use of them. Irene Doukaina’s daughters and other family members are allowed private quarters, more and better-quality food, freedom from the communal regime, choice of whether to attend the church services or eat in the refectory, and permission to bring their own servants. The convent must accept any of Irene’s granddaughters by her daughters Anna or Maria, as well as anyone else who is ‘very illustrious and has a devout disposition’ even if originally tonsured elsewhere, and these illustrious

women are also permitted private accommodation and one servant maintained by the convent, though they must not interfere with the regime of the nuns.¹⁰² The protection of the foundation is also specifically tied to family members and a locked doorway separated the foundation from the founder's apartments which Irene bequeathed to her daughter Anna. As well as privacy, this 'protectress' has a better diet, her own plumbing and servants, and exemption from the communal lifestyle: this is where Anna in retirement composed her *Alexiad*. Any princess unable to countenance the rigours of monastic life is to be allowed her own cell behind the refectory's apse with two servants, either free or slaves, who are to be maintained by the convent. These are additional to the six servants who were there to serve the community as a whole. Princesses were also allowed longer visits outside the convent to relatives who were sick, including overnight stays. Moreover, even though the convent is to be 'completely untrodden by men' and closed even to eunuchs, sons, grandsons and sons-in-law of the founder can attend the liturgy and converse with the superior and older nuns once or twice a year and at the feast of the Theotokos.¹⁰³

Irene reserves to herself the right to run the convent (including appointing the superior and steward), and at Irene's death control of the institution was to pass first to her daughter Eudokia, who was already a nun as an escape from a difficult marriage (Eudokia in fact pre-deceased Irene), then to her eldest daughter Anna Komnene; following Anna to a third daughter Maria; then to Anna's daughter Irene; and then in sequence to all her daughters-in-law and granddaughters in perpetuity with the assumption that they will manage the foundation and regulate its lifestyle. These privileges included the private apartment complex, with its two courtyards, the church of St Demetrios, two bathhouses and one-third of the water piped into the foundation (clearly Irene's family were expected to take more than 12 baths a year), with the right to alter and add to these facilities, with only the proviso that new buildings should not overlook the male monastery of Christ Philanthropos next door.¹⁰⁴

At Lips family members could bring their own attendants or have them assigned in the convent. Theodora Palaiologina considered that her daughters required provisions equal to those of four ordinary nuns plus three nuns each to act as their servants (selected by the superior and prominent sisters); alternatively the princess could have her personal attendants tonsured with her. Even if she chose to live by herself 'on account of ill health' rather than conform to the communal regime, her attendants were still to be maintained by the monastery. Furthermore she could live with one nun of her own choice plus two additional nuns, who would take care of any 'necessary household

affairs'. Granddaughters of Theodora were to be allowed two attendants (either their own personal attendants, or nuns, or one of each), and other relatives one (either a nun or her own attendant). All these relatives were granted provisions sufficient for two nuns, and were exempted from communal eating.¹⁰⁵ Visiting conditions for the ordinary nuns were as stringent at Lips as at Kecharitomene and nuns could only leave the institution in cases of dire necessity. Visiting relatives were only to be seen at the gate in the company of other nuns, except in the case of the seriously ill who could be visited by female relatives, though these were not permitted to stay overnight. Males were entirely prohibited, and only Theodora's son, the emperor Andronikos (the convent's 'protector'), and his retinue, including his male singers, were allowed to enter the convent though Theodora's male relatives were allowed to worship in the churches or visit the family tombs. On the other hand Theodora envisages the superiors of her two convents as not confined to their institutions but frequently meeting and consulting each other over convent matters.¹⁰⁶

Clearly women of all social classes were appreciative of the opportunity to spend the last years of their life with mothers, daughters and other female relatives, in a setting which specifically catered for the needs and priorities of women. Married life with husband and sons would often be an interlude between the two periods at the beginning and end of a woman's life which were spent primarily in the company of other female members of the family. Through establishing monastic foundations women could determine how their property would be utilised: in prayer, commemoration of the dead, and provision of a residence for female family members. In monastic life the mother-daughter bond could become even closer: at Baionaia on Crete, 'Lady Makaria' had a cell constructed at the outer gate of the courtyard, 'so that she may live there with her mother' with the two of them sharing the cell and acting together as the convent's gatekeepers. Neilos approves of this. He also categorically states that any woman who has living children cannot be admitted to his institution until she has undergone a year's trial in secular dress, 'to see if she can endure the loss of her children' and no women with a daughter under the age of 10 may join the convent; once she is 10 mother and child can enter together. He also instructs his nuns that they must not show passionate attachment to their children or other relatives, and that they are not allowed to give them money earned from their handiwork, but only foodstuffs such as fruit (and only then with the permission of the superior). Clearly the mother-child relationship was seen to be so powerful as to override monastic regulations and the ideology of the ascetic life.¹⁰⁷

Widowhood was not necessarily the reason for women deciding to

take the veil. Of course, disparity of ages in marriage would have left many aristocratic and imperial women free to join an all-female community as widows, but the fact that married couples could separate and families be divided upon gender lines into distinct male/female institutions suggests that the attraction of religious communities was based on more than just the desire to compensate for the loss of a spouse. After all, when widows entered a convent, they still joined a community to which their sons had no access, except on very rare occasions, if at all: by becoming nuns they had made a decision which excluded them from any further contact with their male children. In effect convents housed a female-only multigenerational family, in which mothers and daughters could inhabit shared quarters and live and work together, often for considerable periods of time. Moreover, these institutions were generally established on family land and alongside family residences so that these women retired to familiar surroundings. In these communities, dedicated to women's occupations such as handicraft, women could live and worship along the lines which most suited their tastes in terms of music, art, liturgy and literature and in the company of others with shared interests. Here they possessed, perhaps even more than in their earlier lives, the chance to exercise their administrative and organisational talents. Those women who established convents, many of whom defined themselves by their ability to give birth, were creating a new extended family with a material and emotional bond between the founder and her descendants, of whom several generations could reside in this family foundation, secure from the pressures of the outside world. The empress Theodora Palaiologina, mother of Andronikos II, describes precisely where she wants to be buried – near her daughter (probably Anna), who had predeceased her and her 'honoured mother', Eudokia Angelina – 'for I cannot bear to be separated from her [my mother] even after my death'.¹⁰⁸ Granted that she could not be buried in the unconsecrated tomb of her 'heretical' husband Michael VIII, Theodora's instruction for her own burial clearly reflects the importance which mothers and daughters placed on spending their final years together.

¹ A.-M. Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family and the Monastery', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44 (1990): pp. 113–27 at 119; cf. J.P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1987).

² *Typikon* of Theodora Palaiologina for the Convent of Lips in Constantinople, 15, (ed.) H. Delehay, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* (Brussels, 1921), pp. 106–36 (henceforth Lips); (trans.) A.-M. Talbot, in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* (henceforth *BMFD*), (ed.) J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero with G. Constable (Washington, DC, 2000), pp. 1254–86 (my italics).

³ R. Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium 843–1118* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 52 notes the lack of information about nuns and convents in Byzantium prior to c.AD 1000; see also A.-M. Talbot, 'A Comparison of the Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 30 (1985): pp. 1–20 at 1–5; P. Charanis, 'The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 25 (1971): pp. 61–84 at 63–5; for monastic institutions in and around Constantinople, see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin i. 3: Les églises et les monastères* (Paris, 1969); cf. C. Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities: the Evidence of the Typika', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 38 (1988): pp. 263–90.

⁴ Talbot, 'Comparison', 1, comments that 2035 monks and abbots are listed in the first four fascicles of *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaeiologenzeit* as opposed to 84 nuns and abbesses; see also A.-M. Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns: By Choice or Necessity?' *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 103–17 at 103–4.

⁵ Talbot 'Comparison', esp. 18–20; Charanis, 'The Monk', 69–72; cf. C.A. Frazee, 'Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation on the Monastic Life from the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries', *Church History*, 51.3 (1982): pp. 263–79 at 273.

⁶ Charanis, 'The Monk', 71.

⁷ See esp. C. Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Ktitorika Typika: A Comparative Study', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 45 (1987): pp. 77–137, 95–101; cf., for the Middle Byzantine period, D. de F. Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism in the Middle Byzantine Period: Problems and Prospects', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 35–58; J. Herrin, 'Changing Functions of Monasteries for Women during Byzantine Iconoclasm', in L. Garland (ed.), *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience AD 800–1200* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1–15.

⁸ M. Angold, 'The Autobiographical Impulse in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 225–57 at 241, 243–4; cf. P. Gautier, 'La diataxis de Michel Attaliat', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 39 (1981): pp. 5–143, esp. 58.

⁹ P. Gautier, 'Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 42 (1984): pp. 5–145, esp. 18–35 (*BMFD*, pp. 19 and 23, 326–76, 507–63). Pakourianos gave highest priority to his blood relations and those of high social status. For other 'national/ethnic' monasteries, see Charanis, 'The Monk', pp. 78–9.

¹⁰ For some of these flamboyant escapees from family life, despite the pleas of parents and other relatives, like St Nikon the *Metanoieite*, see Talbot, 'Byzantine Family', pp. 119–20.

¹¹ Theodore, *Ep.* 42, cf. *Ep.* 66 to Maria, a virgin.

¹² See J. Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: the Origin and Development of a Motif', *Viator*, 5 (1974): pp. 1–32; a good example is the *Life of St Mary/Marinos* who disguised herself in order to enter the same community as her father, (trans.) N. Constans in A.-M. Talbot (ed.), *Holy Women of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 7–12.

¹³ See the *Typikon* of Theodora Synadene for the Convent of the Mother of God

Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople, 145; (ed.) H. Delehay, *Deux typica l byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* (Brussels, 1921), pp. 18–105; (trans.) A.-M. Talbot: *BMFD*, pp. 1512–78 (henceforth, *Bebaia Elpis*); Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family', pp. 119–29, esp. 128–9; Talbot, 'Comparison', pp. 3–4, 16–18; see also S.E.J. Gerstel and A.-M. Talbot, 'Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside', *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaialogikes Hetaireias*, 27 (2006): pp. 481–90.

¹⁴ A.-M. Talbot, 'Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 113–27 at 118–19; cf. Frazee, 'Late Roman and Byzantine Legislation', pp. 275, 278–9; Talbot, 'Comparison', pp. 5–7.

¹⁵ Talbot, 'Comparison', p. 6; F. Miklosich and J. Müller (eds), *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi Sacra et Profana* (henceforth *MM*) (6 vols, Vienna, 1860–90), 2.80–1.

¹⁶ Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', 114; D.M. Nicol, 'Eirene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaialogina, Princess and Abbess', in *The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits 1250–1500* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 59–70 at 61–4; cf. V. Laurent, 'Une princesse byzantine au cloître', *Echos d'Orient*, 29 (1930): pp. 29–60.

¹⁷ See esp. Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family', pp. 121–6.

¹⁸ *Life of St Elizabeth the Wonderworker*, pp. 256–7, (trans.) V. Karras, in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, pp. 117–35 at 127.

¹⁹ *Life of St Theodora of Thessalonike*, 27–30, (trans.) A.-M. Talbot, in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, pp. 159–237 at 187–90. On Theodora's cult see esp. A.-M. Talbot, 'Family Cults in Byzantium: The Case of St Theodora of Thessalonike', in J.O. Rosenqvist (ed.), *LEIMON: Studies Presented to Lennart Ryden on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia (Uppsala, 1996), pp. 49–69.

²⁰ Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family', pp. 124–5 and 'Late Byzantine Nuns', p. 115: examples of such princesses, who joined institutions which housed mothers, aunts and cousins, include Maria Kantakouzene, daughter of John VI and widow of Nikephoros II of Epiros, Simonis, the daughter of Andronikos II and widow of Stefan Miletin of Serbia, and Theodora, daughter of Michael IX and widow of Michael III Sisman of Bulgaria.

²¹ *Bebaia Elpis* 9.

²² Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', pp. 50–2.

²³ Michael IV, second husband of the Empress Zoe is a good example: prior to his death he established a church and monastery of Sts Kosmas and Damian, a hostel for beggars, and a home for prostitutes; he was tonsured and died in his own monastery: Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, 4.53, (ed. and trans.) E. Renauld (2 vols, Paris, 1926–28), 1.84; Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', p. 116.

²⁴ For examples in saints' lives see Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', pp. 40–42 with n. 14; Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family', pp. 122–3.

²⁵ Theodore, 'Funeral Oration for his Mother Theoktiste' (*BHG* 2422), *PG* 99:883a–902c at 885d–892d; Herrin, 'Changing Functions', pp. 3–4; cf. A. Kazhdan, 'Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 44 (1990): pp. 131–43. For Theoktiste, see also P. Hatlie, 'Images of Motherhood and Self in Byzantine Literature', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 63 (2009): pp. 47–8.

²⁶ Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', pp. 106–7, 113 and 'Byzantine Family', pp. 121–3; cf. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, p. 123. Kallone Palamas, Gregory's mother, had wanted to join a convent when her husband died, though she had five children under the age of eight. She was dissuaded by her family for the sake of her children but once the eldest, Gregory, decided to become a monk on Athos, the family then took vows: Philotheos, 'Encomium of Palamas', *PG* 151:558, 562.

27 Lips 18; G.T. Dennis, 'Death in Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 55 (2001): pp. 1–7 esp. 3, who postulates a mortality rate of c.50% in the first five years of life; cf. A.-M. Talbot, 'Old Age in Byzantium', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 77 (1984): pp. 267–78, esp. 268 for a discussion of life expectancy. St Mary the Younger had four sons, two of whom died before they were five years of age: *Acta Sanctorum*, Nov. 4 (Brussels, 1925), pp. 692–705; (trans.) A. Laiou in *Holy Women of Byzantium*, pp. 239–83, esp. 258–61.

28 Michael Psellos, 'Funeral Oration for his daughter Styliane', in A. Kaldellis (ed. and trans.), *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), 118–38.

29 Michael Psellos, 'Encomium for his Mother Theodote', in U. Criscuolo (ed. and trans.) *Autobiografia: Encómio per la Madre* (Naples, 1989), 11b, 16b-d, (trans.) Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons*, 29–109 at 70, 78–80). See Kaldellis, 31–6 for Psellos' purpose in writing this piece, which cleverly defends Psellos' own political position; cf. J. Walker, 'These Things I Have Not Betrayed: Michael Psellos' Encomium of His Mother as a Defense of Rhetoric', *Rhetorica*, 22.1 (2004): pp. 49–102; Hatlie, 'Images of Motherhood', pp. 45–7 for Theodote's role in his education.

30 Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', p. 107; cf. Laurent, 'Princesse byzantine', pp. 46–7.

31 Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', p. 108 (MM 2.407–10).

32 J. Herrin, "'Femina Byzantina': The Council in Trullo on Women', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992): pp. 97–105 at 101.

33 See the *Testament and Typikon* of Neilos Damilas for the Convent of the Mother of God *Pantanassa* at Baionaia on Crete, 5; S. Pétridès (ed.), 'Le *typikon* de Nil Damilas pour le monastère de femmes de Baëonia en Crète (1400)', *Izvestiia Russkogo arkheologicheskogo instituta v Konstantinopole*, 15 (1911), pp. 92–111; Inventory, (ed.) S. Lampros, 'Das Testament des Neilos Damilas', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 4 (1895): pp. 585–7; (trans.) A.-M. Talbot in *BMFD*, pp. 1462–82.

34 On the functions of monasteries in medieval Byzantium, see Herrin, 'Changing Functions', pp. 1–15; Talbot, 'The Byzantine Family', pp. 124–5 and 'Late Byzantine Nuns', pp. 111–12; Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities', pp. 276–7.

35 Some graphic examples of dysfunctional relationships are given by Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns', pp. 108–10; Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', pp. 53–4 with nn. 52–3; cf. A. Kazhdan, 'Byzantine Hagiography and Sex', pp. 131–43. While many of these scenarios are present in hagiography where the piety of the wife is contrasted with the cruelty of the husband, note especially the case of Hypomene Kalothetina of Thessaloniki who c.1420 became a nun after her husband falsely accused her of adultery and then murdered her mother (MM 2.238–40).

36 Bebaia Elpis 4.

37 The *typikon* of Isaac Komnenos (brother of Alexios I) is remarkable for not stressing blood ties; he prescribes commemoration services only for his parents and mentions just three other individuals, including his adopted son: Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Ktetorika Typika', p. 106.

38 Bebaia Elpis 23.

39 Talbot, *BMFD*, p. 1255; C. Morrisson, 'Coinage and Money in Byzantine Typika', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002): pp. 263–75 at 265.

40 *Typikon* of Empress Irene Doukaina Komnene for the Convent of the Mother of God *Kecharitomene* in Constantinople, (ed.) P. Gautier, 'Le *typikon* de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 43 (1985), pp. 5–165, at 19–155; (trans.) R. Jordan in *BMFD*, pp. 649–724.

41 Kecharitomene 4–5, 70; for the relative size of these two groups of monks and nuns at other institutions, see R. Dubowchik, ‘Singing with the Angels: Foundation Documents as Evidence for Musical Life in Monasteries of the Byzantine Empire’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002): pp. 277–96 at 283, table 2. Kecharitomene at 77% had the highest proportion of choir nuns, Mount Auxentios (a foundation of Michael VIII) at 40% the least (16 choir monks and 24 manual workers).

42 Talbot, *BMFD*, pp. 1255–6.

43 Lips 50–1: the hospital (financed by grants made by her son Andronikos II: Lips 46) had an extensive staff: a priest, three doctors, an assistant, a nurse, a head pharmacist, two pharmacists, six attendants, a blood-letter, three servants, and a cook, as well as a laundress.

44 *Anargyroi: Typikon of Theodora Palaiologina for the Convent of Sts Kosmas and Damian in Constantinople*, (ed.) H. Delehay, *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues* (Brussels, 1921), pp. 136–40; (trans.) A.-M. Talbot in *BMFD*, pp. 1287–94. For Theodora, see A.-M. Talbot, ‘Empress Theodora Palaiologina, Wife of Michael VIII’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 46 (1992), pp. 295–303, esp. 296–7 for her generosity to monastic communities. Theodora’s husband, Michael VIII, also re-founded two monasteries: that of St Demetrios in Constantinople was to house 36 monks, while that of Michael the Archangel on Mt Auxentios was limited to no more than 40. Under the control of St Demetrios he also placed 18 other monasteries, which averaged some 8 monks apiece: Charanis, ‘The Monk’, pp. 70–1.

45 *Typikon of Theodora Synadene for the Convent of the Mother of God Bebaia Elpis in Constantinople*, H. Delehay (ed.), *Deux typica byzantins de l'époque des Paléologues*, pp. 18–105; (trans.) A.-M. Talbot in *BMFD*, pp. 1512–78.

46 *Typikon of Irene Choumnaina Palaiologina for the Convent of Christ Philanthropos in Constantinople*, (ed.) Ph. Meyer, ‘Bruchstücke zweier *typika ktetorika*’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 4 (1895): pp. 45–58; (trans.) A.-M. Talbot in *BMFD*, pp. 1383–88; for this institution, see also A.C. Hero, ‘Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina, Abbess of the Convent of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople’, *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 119–47.

47 Gregoras, *Historia*, 3.238; Talbot, ‘Late Byzantine Nuns’, p. 104 with n. 3.

48 *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas, 6–8, 16.

49 For *typika* as autobiography and self-justification, see Angold, ‘Autobiographical Impulse’, pp. 240–6; see also Galatariotou, ‘Byzantine Ktetorika Typika’, pp. 133–5.

50 Galatariotou, ‘Byzantine Ktetorika Typika’, pp. 89–91. For the power and authority of imperial women, see J. Herrin, ‘The Imperial Feminine in Byzantium’, *Past and Present*, 169 (2000): pp. 3–35.

51 Kecharitomene 1; Lips 11.

52 Hero, ‘Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina’, pp. 145–5 with nn. 74–5.

53 Bebaia Elpis 44, 124, 159, cf. 65.

54 Charanis, ‘The Monk’, p. 76; for such wishful thinking see Galatariotou, ‘Byzantine Women’s Monastic Communities’, pp. 268–9 and 273 on the ‘labour exploitation’ of the working nuns.

55 Bebaia Elpis 116; Angold, ‘Autobiographical Impulse’, p. 252 comments on the autobiographical sketches at the start of her ‘Lincoln College’ *typikon*.

56 Kecharitomene 65, cf. 77.

57 Lips 8. Any nuns transferring to this convent had to be read the *typikon* and assent to it (20).

58 Bebaia Elpis 120: ‘You should read this *typikon* aloud in the refectory more

often than any other book, with all of you listening, and you should read it attentively and read it at the beginning of each month. For if my written instructions are always resounding in your ears, they will not permit forgetfulness to do her work, making you forget these instructions from reading them infrequently, and they will enable my divine purpose to be realized by you.'

⁵⁹ C. Rapp, 'Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and their Audience', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 50 (1996): pp. 313–44 argues that the lives of female saints were not necessarily read by women. In the case of these foundations it is, however, clear that the nuns were instructed to use such lives as models for their own behaviour and aspirations; see *ibid.* pp. 319–21 for collections intended for liturgical (as opposed to private) reading in convents and possibly a male hospital.

⁶⁰ Bebaia Elpis 30.

⁶¹ Bebaia Elpis 132, cf. 30, 31.; Rapp, 'Female Sanctity', pp. 315–16; Theoleptos of Philadelphia, *Monastic Discourses* (ed. and trans.) R.E. Sinkewicz (Toronto, 1992), p. 104.

⁶² See the chapter by Amelia Brown, 'Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in the Byzantine Empire', *infra*.

⁶³ See especially A.-M. Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns: Intellectual Life in the Convents of Late Byzantium', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983): pp. 604–18; A.W. Carr, 'Women and Monasticism in Byzantium: Introduction from an Art Historian', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 1–16 at 4–5.

⁶⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, 5.9.3 (Leib 2.38); Nicol, 'Theodora Raoulaina, Nun and Scholar c. 1240–1300', in *The Byzantine Lady*, pp. 33–47.

⁶⁵ Kecharitomene 6, 32, 40.

⁶⁶ Lips 29; Bebaia Elpis 85.

⁶⁷ Hero, 'Irene-Eulogia', 134–5 comments on her bad spelling and confused syntax.

⁶⁸ *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 13, cf. 20.

⁶⁹ Talbot, 'Theodora Palaiologina', pp. 301–2; for convent libraries, see Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', pp. 609–14; Carr, 'Women and Monasticism', pp. 11–12.

⁷⁰ *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 3, 4, 11, 12 and inventory; cf. Lips 3, Bebaia Elpis 40, 107, where the founders quote Klimakos' *Scala Paradisi*.

⁷¹ Lips 114–15, 3; Bebaia Elpis 18.

⁷² Kecharitomene, prologue, 11, 12; Lips 11–12; Bebaia Elpis 4, 30, 35; cf. Hatlie, 'Image of Motherhood', pp. 41–58; Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities', p. 266.

⁷³ Kecharitomene 5; cf. Lips 18, Bebaia Elpis 148; *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 5, where girls admitted to the convent with their mothers focused on learning to read until the age of 13.

⁷⁴ Philanthropos 2; according to Gregoras (*Historia*, 29.22) Irene shared even the most menial tasks with her nuns: Hero, 'Irene-Eulogia', p. 138; Bebaia Elpis 58, 100. On this 'labour exploitation' of the working nuns, see Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities', p. 273.

⁷⁵ Kecharitomene 14, 19–29. For the administration of monastic estates from the tenth to the fifteenth century, see K. Smyrlis, 'The Management of Monastic Estates: The Evidence of the Typika', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002): pp. 245–61 who notes at 256 that Kecharitomene appears to have been the first institution with a system of centralised reception, with all officials in charge of storing or distributing goods having to keep detailed records; cf. Lips 118 for the records to be kept by the

cellarer.

⁷⁶ Kecharitomene 11.

⁷⁷ Lips 21–6; cf. Anagyroi 5.

⁷⁸ Bebaia Elpis 54, cf. 23, 49, 67–70, 72–3. Note that Psellos' saintly mother Theodote 'made her household increase in prosperity, making skilful use of whatever goods lay at her disposal as well as diligently acquiring those that did not' ('Encomium', 4a; Kaldellis, p. 57).

⁷⁹ Bebaia Elpis 50–3, 55. At Kecharitomene (32) the *ecclesiarchissa* stood in front of the iconostasis, giving the nuns the lead as to when to kneel, rise and pray; she gave notice of the midnight service by striking the *semantron* (38) and at matins began the six psalms, 'singing them slowly and carefully and with a quiet voice so that the rest can follow her without stumbling or error' (39). Note Neilos Damilas' lengthy strictures to his nuns about the unsuitability of 'modern' music: *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 12.

⁸⁰ Bebaia Elpis 56; cf. Dubowchik, 'Singing with the Angels', p. 281.

⁸¹ Kecharitomene 75; Lips 39.

⁸² Bebaia Elpis 61.

⁸³ Dubowchik, 'Singing with the Angels', p. 284 with nn. 30–1.

⁸⁴ E.C. Topping, 'Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 25 (1980): pp. 353–70; E.C. Topping, 'St Matrona and her Friends: Sisterhood in Byzantium', in J. Chrysostomides (ed.), *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for her 80th Birthday* (Camberley, 1988), pp. 211–24.

⁸⁵ See esp. I. Rochow, *Studien zu der Person, den Werken und dem Nachleben der Dicterin Kassia* (Berlin, 1967), pp. 5–29; E.C. Topping, 'Women Hymnographers in Byzantium', *Diptycha*, 3 (1982–83): pp. 98–111, esp. 102–7; E.C. Topping, 'Theodosia: Melodos and Monastria', *Diptycha*, 6 (1994–95): pp. 384–405.

⁸⁶ Kecharitomene 32; cf. the *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 10, where the nuns must perform as many penitential prostrations as possible, up to 200 in 24 hours or as few as 25 depending on their age and fitness; for their cumbersome, and presumably very hot attire, see J. Ball, 'Decoding the Habit of the Byzantine Nun', *Journal of Modern Hellenism*, 27 (2009–10): pp. 25–52. Interestingly, the nuns were permitted baths once a month at Kecharitomene (58), but only four times a year at Lips (34), and the same at Bebaia Elpis (90, 101), 'if they chose to do so'.

⁸⁷ S.E.J. Gerstel, 'Painted Sources for Female Piety in Medieval Byzantium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 89–111 at 89; see also R.F. Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When – and Why?' *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 27–87.

⁸⁸ Talbot, 'Comparison', p. 8 (*MM* 1.222); Gerstel, 'Painted Sources', pp. 90–3; Talbot, 'Comparison', p. 7 notes that the physical structure of convents and monasteries were essentially identical, and that conversion from one to the other did occur, though it was prohibited (*MM* 1.221–6, 1.198); see also A.-M. Talbot, 'The Conversion of Byzantine Monasteries from Male to Female and Vice versa Versa', in C. Scholz and G. Makris (eds), *Polypheuros Nous: Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Munich-Leipzig, 2000), pp. 360–4. For women's (restricted) access to male monasteries, see Talbot, 'Women's Space', pp. 113–18.

⁸⁹ S.E.J. Gerstel, 'Saint Eudokia and the Imperial Household of Leo VI', *The Art Bulletin*, 79 (1997): pp. 699–707.

⁹⁰ Gerstel, 'Painted Sources', pp. 90–1 with n. 3 for a discussion of the depiction of female saints at Hosios Loukas. For female pilgrims at healing shrines, see A.-M. Talbot, 'Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: the Evidence of Miracle Accounts', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 56 (2002): pp. 153–73.

⁹¹ Gerstel, 'Painted Sources', pp. 93, 103.

⁹² For details of commemorations in aristocratic *typika*, see Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Ktetorika Typika', pp. 93–5; cf. Talbot, 'Byzantine Family', p. 124.

⁹³ Kecharitomene 34, 70–1; Lips 30, 42, 52; Anagyroi 3, 6.

⁹⁴ Bebaia Elpis 134–43; for Theodora Synadene's commissioning from a court poet, identified as Manuel Philes, a 42-line funerary epigram for her father Constantine, which describes the reworking of his portrait on a portable panel painting on which the epigram had been inscribed, see S.T. Brooks, 'Poetry and Female Patronage in Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration: Two Epigrams by Manuel Philes', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 60 (2006): pp. 229–31, 237–48; E. Miller (ed.), *Manuelis Philae Carmina* (Paris, 1855–57), 2:162–3. Two further poems were written by Philes which describe a double tomb for Theodora's brother Michael and her husband John: Miller, *Manuelis Philae Carmina*, 2:164–5, nos. 128–9. Presumably both tombs, one for Theodora's parents, the other for her husband and brother, were sited in Bebaia Elpis.

⁹⁵ Bebaia Elpis 145–6.

⁹⁶ Bebaia Elpis 118, 135–6, 139, 144–5, 153, 158–9. For the role played by women in restoring monasteries, see A.-M. Talbot, 'Building Activity in Constantinople under Andronikos II: The Role of Women Patrons in the Construction and Restoration of Monasteries', in N. Necipoğlu (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 329–43; and see V. Dimitropoulou, 'Imperial Women Founders and Refounders in Komnenian Constantinople', in M. Mullett (ed.), *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries* (Belfast, 2007), pp. 87–106.

⁹⁷ Lips 44–9, 50; cf. Anagyroi 4; Talbot, 'Theodora Palaiologina', p. 301.

⁹⁸ Bebaia Elpis 158, cf. 121, 124; Talbot, 'Byzantine Family', pp. 125–6. Irene Doukaina was also concerned with business details, instructing her nuns to buy garments and cloaks in bulk when cheaply available: Kecharitomene 52.

⁹⁹ Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', p. 55: 'in many ways, convent life may not have been very distinctive from that of the upper-class laywoman in the middle Byzantine period'; for the life of Byzantine women, see A. Kazhdan, 'Women at Home', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 1–17.

¹⁰⁰ Kecharitomene 2, 3, 51, 55; Anagyroi 5; Philanthropos 1; Bebaia Elpis 46, 83, 154; cf. Lips 29; Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities', p. 265.

¹⁰¹ Psellos, 'Encomium for his Mother', 22a (Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons*, p. 89).

¹⁰² Kecharitomene 30, 2, 3, 6, 28, 44, 49, 50, 51, 55, 56. Bringing servants to a convent was not a new departure: Theodora of Thessaloniki (20) dedicated three maidservants to her convent upon her tonsure.

¹⁰³ Kecharitomene 79–80, 4–5, 17. It is worth however noting that in practice nuns were able to leave the convent on such occasions as family funerals, to visit shrines or prisoners and the sick, and for administrative and ceremonial duties: Talbot, 'Comparison', pp. 13–14; Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', pp. 46–7.

¹⁰⁴ Kecharitomene 79–80; Zonaras *Epitome Historiarum*, 3.739; Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism', p. 58; on the ephoreia in women's institutions, see Talbot, 'Comparison', pp. 11–12.

¹⁰⁵ Lips 40–1, cf. 29.

¹⁰⁶ Lips 14–6; cf. Anagyroi 6–7; for male access to convents, see Talbot, 'Women's Space', pp. 119–23.

¹⁰⁷ *Typikon* of Neilos Damilas 5, 7, 16.

¹⁰⁸ Lips 42; cf. 30, where, in prescribing the number of loaves (eight) to be

consecrated at the weekly liturgies, she has one of these consecrated jointly for herself and her mother.

Chapter 4

Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in the Byzantine Empire

Amelia R. Brown

From at least Sappho onwards, women have always had a share in reading and writing the Greek language.¹ Over a millennium of this Greek literacy falls within the Byzantine Empire, as literate women appear in surviving literary sources of the fourth to the fifteenth centuries (the limits of this study). From abbesses to empresses, literate Byzantine women lived in Constantinople or farther afield, reading the psalms or composing poetry in classicising Greek. Though always a minority of the female population, literate women represent an important source for the acquisition, extent and character of both male and female literacy in the medieval Mediterranean world. While the sources are sometimes scant, when considered together they establish a general outline of shrinking and then growing female literacy throughout the course of the Byzantine Empire, and how that literacy was acquired, used and passed on to the next generation.

The Byzantine millennium is a difficult era to examine for either male or female literacy, due to the scarcity and poor preservation of written sources, and the variety of spoken languages in general use throughout the Empire. Greek remained at all periods the most widely written and read language, but many women (and men) were literate in other languages too. The extent of literacy was always greater in Constantinople than in any village, and greater among men, the clergy and the aristocracy than among other groups. Many women may have been able to read without being able to write; much of the evidence only supports reading ability, and writing in that era was more technically challenging than it is today. Susan Cole's definition for basic female literacy in classical Greece is a good guide: 'Literacy is understood as knowledge of the alphabet and the ability to write one's own name and to read simple formulaic expressions'.² Clearly, many of the women discussed below also functioned well above this level. Hagiographic, biographical, historical and fictional literature, letters and legal documents all shed some light on Byzantine female literacy, concentrated in Late Antiquity and from the Comnenian dynasty onwards.

First, however, a word on the state of women's literacy in Greek before the Byzantine Empire (as the Byzantines, after all, considered themselves heirs to both Roman and classical Greek civilisation). Greek is among the oldest continuously written languages, and already in the classical era there is evidence of female literacy among wealthy housewives (mainly educated by private tutors), courtesans and a few female poets and philosophers.³ In the Hellenistic and Roman eras, education and literacy in the Greek language spread widely outside the heartland of Greece, and expanded to include many more men and women. While the number of upper-class women who could read and write increased, some middle-class women likely began to possess literacy as well, helped greatly by increasing urbanisation, wider availability of schooling, and economic activities which required literacy.⁴ The Hellenistic kingdoms spawned a burgeoning bureaucracy and a system of public education in many cities, which continued to ensure some urban literacy far into the Byzantine Empire. Texts from Teos and Pergamum record that public elementary and secondary education in those cities was also given to girls during the Hellenistic era.⁵ Although this education was often limited to reading, writing and poetry, it offered literacy to those who could not afford private tutors.

By the first century, Harris writes that, 'At Rome an intelligent woman of the upper class was often able to acquire a good conventional education, and was expected to do so'.⁶ There were Greek female poets of the Roman Empire (some collected in the *Greek Anthology*), but elite women more often used their literacy in administering large households. However, as Harris argues, women married in their teen years and were socially constrained to stay out of the public eye, so were tutored largely at home, and had little opportunity for a formal education.⁷ At the height of the Roman Empire, public schooling for boys was patchy outside large cities, and even less predictable for girls, yet papyri and graffiti seem to show widespread literacy at the level of reading an inscription or writing a list.⁸

Authors as diverse as Plutarch and St Jerome advocated the basic education of women, or recorded girls being taught alongside boys.⁹ Literate women disproportionately belonged to the urban upper class, which valued and needed education; the size of this class at any period is an argument for the number of literate women. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman eras, education for women was predicated on wealth or availability of public schooling, but more widespread than in classical Greece. These eras also witnessed two changes in the Greek language which affected literacy in Greek for centuries to come: the development of both common (*koine*) and literary ('Atticising')

Greek. While the first unified the dialects of Greece into a single international language, the second created a sharper division in the levels of writing in Greek; both these developments characterised the Greek used in Byzantium from the fourth century onwards.

Although Greek long continued in use outside the Byzantine Empire, from the fourth century onwards the new imperial capital of Constantinople was increasingly at the centre of Greek written culture. Christian sources for female literacy include saints' *Lives*, monastic *typika*, and the writings of nuns, abbesses and church men, while 'secular' sources include histories, letters, legal documents, funeral orations and 'popular' literature. Although these types of evidence exist over the course of the entire Byzantine Empire, all of them survive in much greater numbers from the eleventh century onwards. Also, they are disproportionately from cities, especially Constantinople, and most often concern the activities of upper-class and clerical Byzantines. There is little or no information on most areas of the countryside, where literacy was most likely confined to the families of priests or local aristocracy (*archontes*). Despite these cautions, however, there is enough information to perceive some radical changes in women's literacy over the one thousand years of the Byzantine Empire.

Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Centuries

In most ways, the first two hundred years of the 'Byzantine' Empire represented a continuation both of the Roman Empire, and of the earlier Hellenistic era. In many areas encompassed by the Empire, the centuries-old urban traditions of Greek education and literacy continued unabated. Boys, and some girls, continued to attend public elementary schools or study with tutors starting around age 7, and to follow the Hellenistic education model. Learning to read and write began with the alphabet, then continued through syllables, words and sentences to the works of Homer, Euripides, Menander and Demosthenes.¹⁰ This flowed into a 'general education' (ἐγκύκλιος παιδευσίς, or παιδεία), which varied in definition over time, but generally described anything beyond elementary education. In the Latin West this higher education was divided into seven sections, in Wilson's estimation, 'the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, the first part consisting of grammar, rhetoric and logic, the second of music, geometry, arithmetic and astronomy.'¹¹ The existence and survival of this sort of system is also well-documented in the Byzantine Empire, with the addition of some Christian texts, and changes in the numbers of pupils at each level.¹²

During Antiquity, most literate women had received only primary schooling, moved on to manage a household, and received a literary education strictly within the family; these trends all continued under the Byzantine Empire. In many areas of the Empire, girls did not study in schools, but were taught by their parents, or, if they could afford it, a private tutor. After the rise of Christianity, church writings were gradually added to the curricula of tutors and schools alike, and Christianity's heavy emphasis on texts also began to change education. Although the primacy of the text in Christianity doubtless encouraged many parents to teach their daughters to read, this trend was counter-balanced by Christianity's culturally subversive characteristics. To many, this new religion represented a complete break with the past, and in particular a rejection of worldly or traditional education and knowledge. Illiterate holy men were praised above the poets, and the old texts and educational traditions were sometimes called into question.¹³ In advice to his nephews, the Cappadocian Church father St Basil of Caesarea, who had received a traditional education himself, defended the continued teaching of traditional classical literature, yet also compared those texts to flowers, which men, like bees, should exploit only for their moral nourishment.¹⁴

For women, however, Christian sources show some evidence of a shift in opportunities for literacy, and its uses. St Makrina the Younger, sister of Basil as well as St Gregory of Nyssa, was educated by her mother in both reading Scripture and managing the household. Her *Life*, written by her brother Gregory, offers an extended description of a fourth-century upper-class girl's education, and is very revealing of the ambivalent effects of Christianity on education. After the 'time of childhood', around age seven:¹⁵

Ἦν δὲ τῇ μητρὶ σπουδὴ παιδεῦσαι μὲν τὴν παῖδα, μὴ μέντοι τὴν ἐξωθεν ταύτην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον παιδεύειν, ἦν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων αἱ πρῶται τῶν παιδευομένων ἡλικίαι διδάσκονται. Αἰσχρὸν γὰρ ᾤετο καὶ παντάπασιν ἀπρεπὲς ἢ τὰ τραγικὰ πάθη, ὅσα ἐκ γυναικῶν τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ὑποθέσεις τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἔδωκεν, ἢ τὰς κωμικὰς ἀσχημοσύνας ἢ τῶν κατὰ τὸ Ἴλιον κακῶν τὰς αἰτίας ἀπαλὴν καὶ εὐπλαστον φύσιν διδάσκεσθαι, καταμολυνομένην τρόπον τινὰ τοῖς ἀσεμνοτέροις περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν διηγήμασιν. Ἀλλ' ὅσα τῆς θεοπνεύστου γραφῆς εὐληπτότερα ταῖς πρῶταις ἡλικίαις δοκεῖ, ταῦτα ἦν τῇ παιδί τὰ μαθήματα καὶ μάλιστα ἡ τοῦ Σολομῶντος Σοφία καὶ ταύτης πλεόν ὅσα πρὸς τὸν ἠθικὸν ἔφερε βίον.

[There was eagerness in her mother to instruct the child, but not in that 'exterior' and common education [ἐγκύκλιον παιδεύειν], which those of the first age of education are taught mostly through poetry. For she considered it shameful and in every way inappropriate to instruct such a soft and malleable nature either with the suffering of Tragedy, in those works where the poets draw the ideas and subject matter from women, or the indecency of Comedy, or the causes of the evil deeds around Ilion, as she (Makrina) would

in some manner become corrupted from these most unholy tales concerning women. But the parts of the god-inspired writings which seemed easier to grasp for those of this first age of schooling, these were the lessons for this child, especially the wisdom of Solomon, and especially the passages about how to lead a moral life.]

Gregory goes on to describe how his sister continued her education with the psalms, then resisted an early marriage. This passage highlights the benefits and drawbacks of the shift to Christianity; while more girls perhaps learned to read, many parents apparently no longer trusted the old traditions and the content of ‘exterior’ education. However, on balance, this is probably not too different from the traditional distrust of allowing daughters out in public.

Yet some Christian women did still receive the traditional ‘classical’ education. Later in the fourth century, St Olympias, daughter of a Constantinopolitan *comes* (imperial companion), received a ‘very expensive education’ from private tutors, which she used to manage her own extensive estate and the convent she founded, as well as correspond with Church fathers, including John Chrysostom.¹⁶ This certainly included something beyond Scripture and the psalms. However, education solely by the parents, using Scripture and the psalms, was certainly much more common for girls than for boys. Polycarp, among others, exhorted women to educate their own children, especially in Christian teachings, and this usually included the practice of reading.¹⁷

Girls in Christian sources are often taught by their mother or their father, in middle- or upper-class homes where the mother is responsible for the whole household. For instance, in the sixth century, John of Ephesus included among his *Lives of the Eastern Saints* Euphemia, a pious widow in Jerusalem, who ‘took up a regulated life of devotion and wore the garb of a religious, while learning the psalms and teaching them to her daughter, who had been thoroughly instructed since her early youth in psalmody, the Scriptures and writing’.¹⁸ However, unlike this pious widow, the parents of most girls would seek a good marriage for their daughters, sometimes as early as age 12; this marriage would often take precedence over, or end, a girl’s education.¹⁹ A miracle of St Thekla, where she grants an illiterate married woman the ability to read the Bible, may stand as a sign of the end marriage often signalled to education for women.²⁰

The sixth-century *Life* of St Matrona of Perge contains not only a description of her own education, but also some further information on Christian women’s literacy. Born in the late fifth century in Pamphylian Perge (on the southern Anatolian coast), St Matrona, ‘received the customary upbringing and a liberal education from her parents’.²¹ Matrona then put her education to good use, for when she

travelled to Beirut later in life, she converted many pagan women there to Christianity, 'teaching them letters and poring over Scripture with them, especially the blessed David (the Psalter)'.²² Christianity, it seems, might bring literacy to girls whose parents had not educated them. Finally, after Matrona spent many years in Constantinople, according to the *Life*, 'it was God's best beloved Eulogia who related these things, being pressed by those who afterwards desired to learn her (St Matrona's) story'.²³ Although the *Life* as it survives dates from later than the sixth century, it may be based on a real account by one of Matrona's contemporary nuns, whether oral or written. This one *Life*, then, is evidence not only for the fifth- to sixth-century education of girls in urban Asia Minor, but also for the role of Christianity, and the convent, in expanding women's literacy.

As the *Life* of St Matrona demonstrates, women had a new venue for acquiring and employing literacy in Late Antiquity: the convent. Beginning in the late third century, Christian men and women began to found institutions where religious women might live and pray together. Although later evidence is somewhat ambivalent about the literacy of women in convents, there is no doubt that nuns were more often literate than women in the population as a whole. Harris cites the fourth-century advice of Athanasius of Alexandria, for 'holy virgins to have books in their hands at dawn', and monastic rules for convents in the West from the fifth and sixth centuries assume literacy, or advise it to be taught to nuns.²⁴ The *Life* of St Febronia also provides information about literacy and convents: in her convent in Nisibis, the abbess, as well as her assistant and two young novices, read from the Scriptures to the assembled sisters, and to women of the community.²⁵ Although this practice points to a lack of female literacy outside the convent, it suggests that many women inside the convent could read. That they could also write is shown by the examples of Eulogia, Thomais, the author of Febronia's *Life*, and the fourth-century Spanish nun Egeria, who wrote a famous travel diary of the Holy Land in Latin.²⁶ Indeed, nuns of later eras continue to figure heavily in the sources for women's literacy.

Outside the church, the long-standing traditions of literary consumption and production were very slow to change. The copying of classical and Hellenistic literature continued apace in Late Antiquity, to judge from the papyri of Egypt, where Homer, Euripides and novels bulk large among the literary texts. Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* was copied continuously from the second to the seventh centuries, and Hägg has argued persuasively that aristocratic women were among the readers of novels, particularly romances by Heliodorus and Xenophon of Ephesus.²⁷ The famous Vienna Dioscorides, a sumptuous sixth-century copy of a first-century herbal,

was commissioned by the noblewoman Anicia Juliana, who was honoured on its title page, and also a correspondent of the Pope.²⁸

A few female authors are also preserved from this era, concentrated among the writers of *centos* and letters. One of the four known Christian Vergilian *centos* was composed in Latin by a woman, Faltonia Betitia Proba, the wife of a mid fourth-century (and non-Christian) prefect of Rome.²⁹ In fourth-century Alexandria, Hypatia received a full education, wrote commentaries on mathematics and astronomy, and also had a wide correspondence, which many well-educated women of this era seem to have enjoyed.³⁰ Popular writers of imaginary letters, through Aristaenetos in the fifth or sixth century, attribute many to women (as well as to fishermen and farmers), suggesting that it was not inconceivable for women to write, while letters from the early church fathers are often addressed to women.³¹ St Jerome corresponded in Latin with several women, including Paula and her daughter-in-law Laeta (in the case of *Ep.* 107.4 giving explicit advice to the latter on how to teach her daughter to read and write).³² However, the evidence of preserved letters attributed even to historical women is an unreliable source for their literacy, given the abundance of scribes and secretaries available, especially to the wealthy, and the mess inherent in the act of writing.

Empress Eudokia (Athenais), wife of Theodosius II, epitomises the possibilities and perils in studying elite women's literacy in this era, when classicism and Christianity were first joined. The daughter of a (pagan) Athenian sophist, she was educated by her father, then came to Constantinople, where she was selected to marry the young Theodosius on the basis of her beauty and her family connections. Later in life she became a nun in Jerusalem, and works of Christian poetry and paraphrase as well as history and Homeric *centos* are attributed to her pen. She seems to have received a classical education at home from her father, but ended her days studying and commenting on Christian Scripture.³³

Yet the character of the Byzantine Empire changed dramatically in the later sixth to eighth centuries: cities, and their upper classes, were shrinking, or falling prey to Arab or 'barbarian' invaders, and the classical tradition of reading and writing became strained. Additionally, these centuries witnessed two heavy blows to the education of all, which must have affected women too. Justinian's prohibition of pagans from teaching was not immediately successful, but along with his reappropriation of money from education to fortification and church-building, his reign certainly witnessed a drop in the number of teachers and schools.³⁴ More devastating were the first decades of Iconoclasm, and the purges and disorder it caused to the church and the state. By the end of the seventh century, it was

much harder to obtain a classical education in the Greek language, and literacy, or at least the writing of literature, had severely declined.

Arabs and Iconoclasm: Seventh to Eighth Centuries

The low point in Byzantine literacy, or at least preserved texts, coincides with the beginnings of the Iconoclast controversy, and the loss of half the Empire to Arab invaders. Although there continued to be Greek readers and writers living in Arab-held territories, especially in exile during Iconoclasm, centres of Hellenism like Alexandria and Antioch were no longer ruled from Constantinople, and their loss shifted the balance of culture away from the old eastern centres of culture and education, and squarely onto Constantinople and a few other cities. The urban aristocracy, one of the main bastions of literacy, declined, as did the numbers of teachers, writers and books being copied; perhaps even, 'province-wide disruption of practical literacy may have occurred'.³⁵ The literary sources for this 'Dark Age' of the mid sixth to the mid ninth centuries reflect a shrinking empire wracked by political and religious controversies, where elementary education must nevertheless have continued. The decline in urban population meant a decline in women's literacy, but some basic patterns of education for women continued. In general, the shift from classical to Christian texts in education continued, and was refined, as an enduring balance was established between classical and ecclesiastical writings.³⁶ For women, Christianity still offered opportunities for literacy, and a few women even received a recognisably classical education.

In 630, Sergia, abbess of the convent of St Olympias in Constantinople, wrote the *Narration*, an homage to St Olympias, and a detailed history of the convent since her day. Although Sergia's Greek was, 'sometimes less than elegant', in the judgment of Clark, she still was able to compose a coherent homage to her fourth-century predecessor, which became attached to Olympias' *Life*.³⁷ In the early eighth century, the parents of St Stephen the Younger 'educated' their first three daughters, 'in letters and piety like their own'.³⁸ A contemporary *Life* of the Virgin Mary has her receive a similarly described education from her own father.³⁹ Many girls were educated by their parents or even local school teachers, but there were exceptions; in his late eighth-century funeral oration for his mother Theoctista, Theodore Stoudion describes his mother's education as a middle-class orphan:⁴⁰

δεύτερον, τοῦ θειοῦ πόθου αὐξοντος αὐτῆς ἐν καρδίᾳ, ἐπειδὴ ἦν ἀγράμματος ἐξ ὀρφανείας ἀγομένη, γραμματίζει ἑαυτὴν ἡ σοφὴ καὶ συνετίζει, καὶ τὸ ψαλτήριον ἀποστηθίζει καλλίστα τε καὶ συντομώτατα.

[Next, when divine desire grew in her heart, and since she was unlettered from being an orphan, wise as she was she taught herself letters and inquired constantly, and she committed the Psalter to heart well and in the shortest time.]

Together these accounts reveal the kind of education upper- and even middle-class women continued to receive in this period, and afterwards: an elementary education starting around age 7, usually at home, with the Bible and the Psalms as the basic teaching texts. Christian texts dominate our sources for this era, and though education based on the classical authors (especially Homer) clearly also continued, there is a clear shift towards the use of sacred writings (τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα) for elementary education of both boys and girls.⁴¹

There is also some more secular evidence for this era: written documents remained in use, and at least a few women signed their marriage contracts or wills.⁴² Because of the paperwork involved, female land-owners who were neither wealthy nor urban might have been able to write, and many women did own land in their own names. However, literacy was certainly much more limited, and confined to a lower level, than in earlier eras, while the persistence of classical traditions is apparent from the evidence of the next few centuries.

Macedonian Renaissance: Ninth to Eleventh Centuries

Even before the first ruler of the Macedonian dynasty, Basil I, took the throne in 867, the ninth century had already become a period of renaissance for the Byzantine Empire. After 200 years of religious and military crisis, the Empire was once again stable enough to support education, scholarship and literacy, which were all increasing. Although Iconoclasm did not officially end until 843, its second period did not have the devastating effects of the first. In fact, the numerous church councils around the turn of the century may have motivated a new round of reading and copying of texts. The report of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, which re-established the veneration of Icons, contains quotations from some 70 different texts, most of which were produced and read aloud at the council.⁴³ Elementary education had clearly continued during the ‘Dark Age’, with a shift towards a greater reliance on Christian texts, but few men, and even fewer

women, received much beyond this.

However, in the ninth century there is ample evidence for a rise in the numbers of literate women, and their higher level of literacy. The end of Iconoclasm, the invention of minuscule writing, and the replacement of papyrus with paper (while parchment continued in use) all contributed to this growth in literacy. An examination of surviving literary sources reflects the result of these developments: a larger number of better-educated women (and men). The larger number of the literate is reflected most simply in the explosion of new texts and new copies of old texts in this era, as old texts were copied, studied and anthologised as never before. This growth of literacy also meant that some women received more than an elementary education, and others who were illiterate had their own daughters educated.

This growth in literacy is reflected in sources both religious and secular. The first three known female hymnographers all wrote in the ninth century, and came from similar backgrounds. Theodosia, Thekla and Kassia were all Constantinopolitan nuns of aristocratic origin, and while Theodosia and Thekla composed minor works, the hymns of Kassia successfully entered the Orthodox liturgy. However, the literacy of these female hymnographers cannot necessarily be ascribed to their residence in convents; Kassia in particular came from an aristocratic family, and all three women were probably educated by tutors in childhood.⁴⁴ Additionally, the fact that writing went on in convents does not mean that they served as schools for local girls. Unlike the medieval West, in Byzantium convents were seen as places apart from society, and schools in them were frowned upon. They may have offered education to the young nuns within their walls, though, and they certainly provided a supportive environment for women like Kassia.

The ninth century also boasts several literate female saints from different parts of the Empire outside Constantinople. The *Vita of St Irene of Chrysobalanton* does not include any particulars about her education, but it does assume her ability both to read and write. Irene comes from a wealthy family in Cappadocia to Constantinople, where she is received by relatives who bear the name of a family of high officials, enters the Chrysobalanton convent, and soon becomes its abbess (*hegoumene*). As the daughter of an aristocratic provincial family, she must have been educated, for in the convent she 'was so devoted to the Divine Scriptures and so engrossed [ἐνησχόλητο] by the *Lives of the Fathers*, collecting everything good and useful, that she seemed a mouthpiece of the God-inspired words'.⁴⁵ Furthermore, after she became abbess, she wrote a letter to the emperor in her own hand; though her *vita* is laced with novelistic flourishes, the anonymous author does not seem to introduce elements which would seem

inappropriate to a tenth-century reader.⁴⁶

The *Lives* of two ninth-century saints from the island of Aegina give more information about female education, and its uses. St Athanasia was educated in what had become the traditional fashion, or at least the default description for a girl's education: 'At age seven, she learned the Psalter in a short time, and studied all the holy writings eagerly.'⁴⁷ That this does not refer to simple memorisation is apparent later in the *Life*, since, 'on Sundays and Feast-days, affectionately assembling all of the local women around her, she read the holy writings to them'.⁴⁸ Evidently St Febronia's earlier activity in Nisibis was not an isolated instance, but a general feature of convent life. Although, again, this practice argues for the literacy of nuns, it also suggests that most 'local women' could neither read the holy writings, nor afford books. St Theodora of Thessaloniki was also a native of Aegina, and when 'seven years old ... learned the sacred letters [τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα] and part of the Psalms'.⁴⁹

Finally, though it concerns a fifth-century saint, the *Life of St Elizabeth the Wonderworker* was written in Middle Byzantium, and describes an education probably relevant to that era. The *Life of St Elizabeth*, daughter of a well-off family of Thracian Abydenoi, reports that, 'by the age of three, her father ... turned her over to the learning of sacred letters [τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα]'.⁵⁰ Whether she was educated by her father or a tutor, and despite her precocity, Elizabeth received the education that had been established for girls for several hundred years by this point. This education, then, usually took place between about ages 6 and 12, and included at least the reading of the Psalms.

Outside religious sources, there is also secular evidence of a growth in literacy in this era: more seals, charters, wills, letters and tax documents all survive, and some of them bear female writing. Manuscript illuminations are often thick with books and letters, suggesting that they were a common facet of life, at least among illuminators. Indeed, in this period books seem to have been read, copied and collected as never before. The *Bibliotheka* of Photios, for example, is an impressive though probably extreme example of the number of books available in ninth-century Constantinople. By the eleventh century new popular fiction was being written, even in vernacular Greek, surely reflecting an expanding reading public.⁵¹

Women not only acquired education for religious reasons; managing a large household was still easier with literacy; moreover, the aristocracy, which could afford private tutors, and large households, also grew in this period. In addition, women also participated in middle-class trades in the cities, many of which suggest literacy (shop-keeping) or require it (book-copying). The tenth-century correspondence of an anonymous Byzantine teacher is full of

references to his many students, and his fellow tutors.⁵² The literacy of Empresses Irene and Theodora is not as inapplicable to the larger picture as seems at first, for neither was born into the imperial family.

The most definitive evidence for women's literacy in this era, and its development, comes from the funeral orations of Michael Psellos. The premier intellectual of the eleventh century, Psellos came from a middle-class family, and his descriptions of the education of his mother, Theodota, and his daughter, Styliane, evoke a range of possibilities for women's literacy. His mother was not illiterate, but her education resembled that of Theoctista, and was probably fairly typical for the urban middle-class. Psellos wrote that her gender prevented her from going to school, but, 'whenever my mother might escape notice, she acquired the beginnings of letters from them alone, teaching herself, and she made syllables and words, without need of instruction in the basic elements'.⁵³ As this occurred before his birth, Psellos may have been assuming his mother came to be literate in this way, and with the earlier evidence of Theoctista, offered it as an admirable, and typical, way for girls to teach themselves to read. Psellos' mother's dedication to education continued; later in life she encouraged him in school, and worked on furthering her own literacy at night.

Perhaps inspired by her example, as well as changing times and his own love of learning, Psellos claims that he educated his own daughter more carefully. Although his oration for her, upon her death at age 9, is highly rhetorical, classicising and probably exaggerated, it does contain detailed information about her elementary education. While Psellos' mother taught herself to read, Styliane has teachers (παιδαγῶγοι) and classmates (συμμαθήτριαι). Whether these classmates are members of the family, taught together at home, or real schoolmates, is unclear, but the education she received was certainly extensive for her age: 'she grasped the basics of letters, and the combination of syllables, and the agreement of nouns; after preparing her mind with these, she embarked upon the Davidic psalms'.⁵⁴ Psellos goes on to praise her intelligence as well as her obedience and soft nature. However, he also praises the equal time she spent studying and at the loom, reminding us of the values in his ancient models for such a funeral oration.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Styliane did apparently receive a formal elementary education, and would probably have been literate enough to read the classics if she had lived; she might even have been typical of a growing number of urban daughters in Constantinople in the eleventh century.

The Comnenian Dynasty: 1081–1204

From the reign of the Comnene family onwards, the sources for Byzantine women's literacy sharply increase. Though information from these more recent eras is more likely to be preserved, a steady growth in general literacy is also likely, and Laiou has argued that, in the Comnenian era, 'there is a certain positive perception of women who had achieved greater education than that required for reading the simplest religious texts'.⁵⁶ However, the religious texts themselves also repay examination: in particular, monastic foundation documents (*typika*) reveal optimistic assumptions about literacy among (aristocratic) nuns.⁵⁷ In her *typikon* for the convent of Kecharitomeni, the only one surviving from this early period written by a woman, Irene Doukaina assumes the literacy of at least eight officials at her convent. Besides keeping account books, each official was responsible for receiving and passing on written documents related to her office.⁵⁸

Another Irene, the mid twelfth-century Sevastokratorissa, was an active literary patroness, a φιλολογωτάτη member of the royal family who borrowed books, commissioned them and discussed them with others.⁵⁹ According to Jeffreys, letters to her from the monk Iacovos praise her 'skillful use of language', but caution her on her 'interest in Homer and pagan literature'.⁶⁰ She was even a patroness of John Tzetzes, although obviously not of his poems disparaging female scholars (who thus clearly existed). These two Irenes, although royal, likely belonged to a growing group of literate and aristocratic women, who managed large estates, and often had far more than the ability to read the Bible.

This growth in literacy was not confined to Constantinople. The trickle of written records from earlier periods swells under the Comnene, and many surviving wills, charters, marriage agreements and other documents concern women. In legal documents from eleventh-century Byzantine Southern Italy, several women sign their names to documents drawn up at their behest: 'Serika, the daughter of Mavros, from the castle of Stilo in Calabria' and 'Gemma, widow of Nikephoros, a local official and record-keeper' both left detailed wills signed in their own hands.⁶¹ These testaments to their literacy not only record their own not insubstantial possessions, but also suggest that some upper-class provincial women were literate. Many of the other women in these documents, like Theodote, who took her brothers to court in 1093 over possession of her dowry, were doubtless literate. A novel of the Emperor Isaac Angelos from 1187 requires the written consent of bishop's wives, if their husbands wish to put them aside.⁶² However, one must not get too carried away; more typical is the fact that among the 49 signatories of a twelfth-century *typikon* of a confraternity in Naupaktos, the three women listed all make a cross.⁶³

The most famous literate woman of this period must be Anna Comnena, princess and author of the *Alexiad*. She may encapsulate the challenges and achievements of the female Constantinopolitan aristocracy. While on the one hand she did receive an excellent education, she also had to struggle for it. She described her own education as, ‘not unversed in letters, but having bestowed special pains on the study of Greek and being not unpracticed in rhetoric, and having well studied the Aristotelian system and the dialogues of Plato, and having fortified my mind with the *quadrivium* of sciences’.⁶⁴ She both studied and practised medicine, and wrote the *Alexiad*, a history of the reign of her father. This was not the standard education available even to a princess in this period, though, as is revealed by the funeral oration composed after her death by George Tornikes, a member of her circle and the bishop of Ephesus. He reports that Anna’s parents feared the moral effects of a classical education, and therefore Anna was forced secretly to seek lessons in grammar from a palace eunuch. Only after her marriage did she study the advanced grammar, rhetoric, philosophy and history she later rightly bragged of in her *Alexiad*.

However, even if Anna went beyond normal limits, she was certainly expected to acquire literacy. She recalled her mother, ‘with the midday meal set before her, holding a book in her hands and scrutinizing the words of the holy doctrinal fathers, and especially Maximus the philosopher and martyr’.⁶⁵ Literacy was thus common for women as well as men among the noble families of Constantinople; it was Anna’s particular interest in the classics which set her apart. Throughout her life, she surrounded herself with scholars, and like many of her contemporaries, served as a literary patroness.

Nicaea and the Palaiologi: 1204–1453

The evidence for increasing women’s literacy in Byzantium bypasses the disaster of the Fourth Crusade with hardly a trace. Several surviving *typika* paint a picture of convents filled with both literate and illiterate women, where some effort was made to educate the illiterate, especially if they were young. In her *typikon* for the convent of Bebaia Elpis of 1345, Theodora Palaiologina advised the abbess to teach her nuns ‘the holy lessons [διδάγματα] of philosophy according to God’, while the choir mistress (*ekklesiarchissa*) ‘taught the novices to read and chant the psalms’, yet all of this instruction might have been oral.⁶⁶ The founder of a convent in Baionia, Crete, c.1400, ‘urged the educated nuns to teach their illiterate sisters how to read,’ but despite these measures, all the *typika* make allowances for illiterate nuns, and

for 'those unable to read to pray or recite the psalms'.⁶⁷ This advice also reminds us that every woman who knew the psalms by heart was not necessarily literate.

However, most *typika* do assume literacy in the officials of the convent, who are ordered to report to the abbess in writing, and keep copious written records. There was certainly a class and literacy distinction in many convents; most of the church nuns (*ekklesiastikai*) were drawn from the upper classes, while the working nuns were poorer before entering the convent.⁶⁸ The assumed literacy of the church nuns, who spent most of their time chanting the daily liturgy and doxology, or reading privately, is testament to the education of upper-class girls outside of convents. The flip side, the acknowledged illiteracy of some of the working nuns, shows how much of a determinant class was in education and literacy of women. For those who wished to learn, though, the convent was a place where teachers and books could be found, for the illiterate woman or the intellectual. In the late fourteenth century, a Thessalonikan nun known as Palaiologina not only composed 'canons to St Demetrius, St Theodora and other saints', but also educated a visiting nun from Constantinople 'in virtue and literature'.⁶⁹ Many of the *typika* provide for libraries, and for the education of novices or daughters of entering nuns. Most convents contained a library of at least liturgical and patristic books, if only those brought by women upon entering.⁷⁰

The resurgence of the aristocracy and Constantinople from the later thirteenth century certainly had beneficial effects on literacy. A selection of legal documents of this period, although haphazardly preserved, nevertheless reinforces the picture of women's literacy as confined mainly to the urban aristocracy. In 196 cases from a variety of sources, just 15 women sign their own names; the illiterate include both the rural peasantry and some of the well-born, while the literate are mainly wives of high officials, or members of the royal family.⁷¹ For instance, in the thirteenth century, Laiou notes that, 'two distinguished ladies sign with their own hands in the Lembiotissa cartulary, Irene Branaina and Irene *protovestiarissa*'.⁷²

However, the inability to sign your name does not necessarily restrict your reading ability. In an age of expensive paper and messy ink, reading may still have been much more common than writing.⁷³ In Thessaloniki, the educated Eudokia, daughter of the *protasekretis* Neokaisarites, 'discussed books and intellectual questions' with a circle of friends, according to Laiou.⁷⁴ Although they are not visible in surviving legal documents, large numbers of women in the retail trade are also recorded by Ibn Battuta and other travellers in Constantinople, in this period and earlier.⁷⁵ At least some of these artisans, bakers or shop-owners must have found literacy useful for

keeping accounts or conducting business.

This period also witnessed the growth of contacts with the West, which led to some Westernising literature, and a growth in writing in both high and low-style Greek. One erotic poem translated by Laiou promises, 'not only to arouse the women who hear it, but also to provide satisfaction', suggesting a female readership.⁷⁶ The fourteenth-century vernacular Greek romance *Livistros and Rodamni* features a lengthy correspondence between the two titular lovers, who communicate via letters attached to arrows. Livistros narrates the story, in Betts' translation: 'I wrote this letter and again I dispatched it. Again the lady found and read it. She was distressed, she sighed over its message, she felt sorry for what it said, and again wrote me a reply.'⁷⁷ Although this is a fictitious story, with both Latin and Greek influences, the primacy of literacy to the plot cannot be entirely spurious. The author, at least, could envision a beautiful and literate princess.

Two women of this period stand out for their literacy, and embody the results of high levels of education available to upper-class women. Theodora Raoulaina, member of a noble family and a nun, was, according to Talbot, 'not only a scholar, book collector, and patron of the arts, but also a scribe and a hagiographer'.⁷⁸ Among others things, she copied out a volume of Aelius Aristides and composed a *vita* of the ninth-century saints Theodore and Theophanes. She may even have been the patroness of a remarkable group of high quality manuscripts known as the Palaiologina group.⁷⁹ She certainly traded books and letters with several leading men of Constantinople, including Nikephoros Choumnos, the father and tutor of the leading female intellectual of the next generation, Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina. Widowed young, Irene-Eulogia founded a convent, 'engaged in extensive correspondence ... commissioned the copying of manuscripts, and exchanged books'.⁸⁰ However, she was another daughter whose education was neglected by her father, and her surviving letters contain, 'bad spelling' and 'confused syntax', though she was an avid reader and literary patroness.⁸¹

These two Palaiologan women reflect the highest level of education available to any woman of this era, and certainly sit atop a continuum extending down from them, through noble ladies and abbesses, to common nuns and the middle class, with the unlettered masses forming the greatest number of women. However, their example, and those of the other women mentioned above, well depict the state of women's literacy at the end of the Byzantine Empire. When the Turks took Constantinople in 1453, many of its residents had already fled to Italy, where some women undoubtedly helped to spread Greek literacy along with the more famous men. The Byzantine Empire had fallen,

but women's literacy in Greek continued.

Conclusion

Women's education and literacy clearly varied widely during the Byzantine Empire. Women learned to read and write at home from parents or tutors, at schools, in convents and by their own impetus. They wrote in vernacular Greek with many spelling errors, or high classicising prose which was the equal of their male contemporaries. They read the psalms with difficulty, enjoyed the church fathers, or searched for and copied rare editions of the classics. Though there were always fewer literate women than men, the larger the upper class, the larger the number of literate women. From a relatively large amount of female literacy during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the Byzantine Empire witnessed initial stability, then a drop, and then a gradual increase in women's literacy. Anna Comnena had more in common with Hypatia than with the Dark Age abbess Sergia; they shared a similar education, and wide-ranging interests in both philosophy and science. The largest change in literacy was related to Christianity. Many of the women examined here ended their lives in convents, sometimes unwillingly; almost all were educated with some Scripture, especially the psalms. Christian literature was some of the first literature written in a low-style Greek, and it was designed for those with an elementary education. Although it never replaced the classics entirely in the schools, it was certainly the only literature many women ever read. In terms of women's literacy, the growth of Christianity seems to have been a generally positive factor. The women examined here were all atypical, in the sense that their lives were recorded, but their literacy was not entirely unusual. Although they were concentrated among the upper-class and the nuns, there were some literate women at every period of the Byzantine Empire, reading, writing and educating their own children.

1 For Sappho see most recently: A. Poochigian (trans.), *Sappho: Stung with Love: Poems and Fragments* (London, 2009); E. Greene and M.B. Skinner, *The New Sappho on Old Age: Textual and Philosophical Issues* (Washington, DC, 2009); M.L. West, 'The New Sappho', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 151 (2005): pp. 1–9; A. Carson, *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York, 2002). My deepest thanks go to Ruth Webb for encouraging me to first pursue this research.

2 S.G. Cole, 'Could Greek Women Read and Write?', in H.P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (New York, 1981), pp. 219–45, at 219.

3 E. Greene, *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Norman, 2005); I.M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Norman, 2004); R. Hawley, 'The Problem of Women Philosophers in Ancient Greece', in L.J. Archer, S. Fischler and M.A. Wyke (eds), *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night* (London, 1994), pp. 70–87; Jane McIntosh Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre* (Carbondale, 1989); W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 96.

4 For modern analogies to urbanisation encouraging literacy, see Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 13.

5 Cole, 'Could Greek Women Read and Write?', p. 231.

6 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 252.

7 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 253.

8 For the modern debate on the extent of literacy in classical antiquity, see the papers collected in W.A. Johnson and H.N. Parker (eds), *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 2009).

9 For Plutarch see his *Consolatio* (*Mor.* 608B); for Jerome see below.

10 H.-I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, (trans.) G. Lamb (London, 1956), [chapter 6](#). For a newly discovered ancient Greek exercise tablet with the syllables see A.N. Tsaravopoulos, 'Graffiti from the Island of Kythera', *Horos*, 13 (1999): pp. 261–7.

11 N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (Baltimore, 1983), p. 20.

12 Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, pp. 21–3.

13 Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, p. 331.

14 St Basil of Caesarea, 'Address to young men on reading Greek literature,' in R.J. Deferrari and M.R.P. McGuire (trans.), *Saint Basil: The Letters*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA, 1926).

15 My translation of P. Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Vie de sainte Macrine*, Sources chrétiennes 178 (Paris, 1971), 3.6–19, at pp. 148–51.

16 E.A. Clark (trans.), *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends* (New York, 1979), p. 129.

17 *The Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*, 4, in M.W. Holmes (ed. and trans.), *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (3rd edn, Grand Rapids, 2006).

18 Translated from the Syriac in S.P. Brock and S.A. Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley, 1987), p. 126, from John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, 12: *Mary and Euphemia*, (ed.) E.W. Brooks, 'Lives of the Eastern Saints', *Patrologia Orientalis*, 17 (1923): pp. 166–86.

19 J. Herrin, 'Public and Private Forms of Religious Commitment among Byzantine Women,' in L.J. Archer, S. Fischler, and M.A. Wyke (eds), *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, (London, 1994), pp. 181–203, at 187.

20 PG 85, 617D.

21 *Life of St Matrona of Perge*, (trans.) J. Featherstone, in A.-M.M. Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium* (Washington, DC, 1996), p. 19. Text from *Acta Sanctorum Novembris* 3, BHG 1221 (Brussels 1910), cols 790–813, at 791A, 2: τυχοῦσα δὲ τῶν νενομισμένων τροφείων καὶ ἀγωγῆς ἐλευθέρως ὑπὸ τῶν γεννησάμενων.

²² *Life of St Matrona of Perge*, (trans.) J. Featherstone, p. 38. *Acta Sanctorum Novembris* 3, 800B, 19: καὶ αὐτὰς γράμματα διδάσκουσα καὶ πᾶσαν γραφὴν ἐπιστένουσα καὶ μάλιστα τὴν τοῦ μακαρίου Δαυῖδ.

²³ *Life of St Matrona of Perge*, (trans.) J. Featherstone, p. 62. *Acta Sanctorum Novembris* 3, 812A, 50: τῆς θεοφιλεστάτης Εὐλογίας διηγησαμένης ταῦτα, καὶ αὐτῆς ἀναγκασθείσης παρὰ τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπιθυμησασῶν μαθεῖν τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς.

²⁴ Athanasius *De virginitate* 12, translated and cited in a general discussion of monastic literacy by Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, pp. 303–04, n. 88. In the text (ed.) E. von der Goltz, Λόγος σωτηρίας πρὸς τὴν παρθένον (Leipzig, 1905), 12.11–14, Athanasius gives the advice to a nun, in my translation: ‘let your work be always the study of the holy texts. Have the psalter and learn the psalms. Let the rising sun see the little book in your hands’ (ἦτω δὲ τὸ ἔργον σου διαπαντὸς μελέτη τῶν θείων γραφῶν. ψαλτήριον ἔχε καὶ τοὺς ψαλμοὺς μάνθανε. ἀνατέλλων ὁ ἥλιος βλέπew τὸ βιβλίον ἐν ταῖς χερσὶ σου). For the literacy expected or encouraged by early medieval western female monastic rules see S.F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society* (Philadelphia, 1981).

²⁵ Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, pp. 154–5; though this saint is placed in the third century, her *Life* was written in the sixth century and probably reflects monastic practices of that era.

²⁶ For Egeria see the edition of P. Maraval (ed.), *Egérie: Journal de voyage: Itinéraire*, Sources chrétiennes, 296 (2nd edn, Paris, 1997).

²⁷ Tomas Hägg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 95–7. Hägg’s arguments are critiqued but expanded upon by E. Bowie, ‘The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World’, in J. Tatum (ed.), *The Search for the Ancient Novel* (Baltimore, 1994), pp. 435–59, at 436–42 (largely repeated in E. Bowie, ‘The Ancient Readers of the Greek Novels’, in G. Schmeling (ed.), *The Novel in the Ancient World* (2nd edn, Leiden, 2003), pp. 87–106, at 96–100). For a recent summary of this ‘open’ question see R. Hunter, ‘Ancient Readers’, in T. Whitmarsh (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 261–71.

²⁸ Leslie Brubaker, ‘The Vienna Dioskorides and Anicia Juliana’, in A.R. Littlewood, H. Maguire and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *Byzantine Garden Culture* (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 189–214.

²⁹ S. McGill, ‘Virgil, Christianity, and the Cento Probae’, in J.H.D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea, 2007), pp. 173–94; Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre*, p. 136; F. Ermini, *Il centone di Proba e la poesia centonaria* (Rome, 1909). On the cento genre see S. McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity* (Oxford, 2005).

³⁰ M.A.B. Deakin, *Hypatia of Alexandria: Mathematician and Martyr* (Amherst, 2007); Snyder, *The Woman and the Lyre*, p. 117.

³¹ On the genre of imaginary epistolography in Late Antiquity and its female protagonists see A. Tiziana Drago, *Aristeneto: Lettere d’amore. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento* (Lecce, 2007); R. Morello and A.D. Morrison, *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford, 2007); C.D.N. Costa (trans.), *Greek Fictional Letters* (Oxford, 2001); P.A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge, 2001).

³² On the role of these letters in the development of Christianity see E.A. Clark, ‘Authority and Humility: A Conflict of Values in Fourth-Century Female Monasticism’, *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 17–33; P.R.L. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (2nd edn, New York, 2008). On Jerome’s ambivalent relationships with both women and Classical literature, often at the same time, see A. Mohr, ‘Jerome, Virgil, and the

Captive Maiden: The Attitude of Jerome to Classical Literature', in J.H.D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea, 2007), pp. 299–322.

³³ M. Whitby, 'The Bible Hellenized: Nonnus' Paraphrase of St John's Gospel and "Eudocia's" Homeric Centos', in J.H.D. Scourfield (ed.), *Texts and Culture in Late Antiquity: Inheritance, Authority, and Change* (Swansea, 2007), pp. 195–232; J. Burman, 'The Athenian Empress Eudocia', in P. Castrén (ed.), *Post-Herulian Athens: Aspects of Life and Culture in Athens, A.D. 267–529* (Helsinki, 1994), pp. 63–88.

³⁴ P. Lemerle, *Byzantine Humanism*, (trans.) H. Lindsay and A. Moffatt, *Byzantina Australiensia* vol. 3 (Canberra, 1986), p. 77.

³⁵ M.E. Mullett, 'Writing in Early Medieval Byzantium', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 156–85, at 161.

³⁶ A. Moffatt, 'Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries', in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (eds), *Iconoclasm* (Birmingham, 1977), pp. 85–92.

³⁷ Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends*, p. 119.

³⁸ PG 100, 1076, my translation: ἐν γράμμασι καὶ εὐσέβεια ὁμοῖα αὐτῶν ἀνέτρεφεν.

³⁹ Moffatt, 'Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries', p. 88.

⁴⁰ PG 99, 885, my translation.

⁴¹ Moffatt, 'Schooling in the Iconoclast Centuries', p. 92.

⁴² R. Browning, 'Literacy in the Byzantine World', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 4 (1978): pp. 39–54, at 49.

⁴³ C. Mango, 'The Availability of Books in the Byzantine Empire, A.D. 750–850', in *Byzantine Books and Bookmen: A Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium, 1971* (Washington, DC, 1975), pp. 29–45, at 30.

⁴⁴ E. Topping, 'Women Hymnographers in Byzantium', *Diptycha*, 3 (1982–83): pp. 98–111, at 101.

⁴⁵ Translated by J.O. Rosenqvist, *The Life of St Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton* (Uppsala, 1986), p. 17, with text: οὕτω δὲ προσέκειτο ταῖς θείαις γραφαῖς καὶ οὕτως ἐνησχόλητο τοῖς τῶν πατέρων βίοις, πᾶν εἶτι καλὸν καὶ πρόσφορον ἐρανίζουσα, ὡς στόμα δοκεῖν τῶν θεοπνεύστων εἶναι ῥημάτων.

⁴⁶ Rosenqvist, *The Life of St Irene Abbess of Chrysobalanton*, p. 99.

⁴⁷ My translation of L. Carras (ed.), 'The Life of St Athanasia of Aegina: A critical edition with introduction', in A. Moffatt (ed.), *Maistor*, *Byzantina Australiensia* 5 (Canberra, 1984), pp. 199–224, at 212, 3.15–16: ἐπταετῆς δὲ γενομένη τὸ τε ψαλτήριον ἐν ὀλίγῳ καιρῷ ἔμαθεν καὶ πάσαις ταῖς ἁγίαις γραφαῖς προθύμως ἐσχόλαζεν. For a published translation, see Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*.

⁴⁸ My translation of 'The Life of St Athanasia', (ed.) Carras, p. 213, 5.20–22: ἐν δὲ ταῖς κυριακαῖς καὶ ἑορτασίμοις ἡμέραις τὰς γείτονας ἀπάσας ἀγαπητικῶς πρὸς ἑαυτὴν ἐπισυνάγουσα τὰς θείας αὐταῖς γραφὰς ἀνεγίνωσκεν.

⁴⁹ 'Life of St Theodora', (trans.) A-M.M. Talbot, in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, p. 167.

⁵⁰ 'Life of St Elizabeth', (trans.) V. Karras, in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, p. 126.

⁵¹ R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (London, 1996), p. 12.

⁵² R. Browning, *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature and Education* (London, 1977), no. 9.

⁵³ My translation of Michael Psellos, Ἐγκώμιον εἰς τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ, (ed.) K.N. Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothēke: Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi: Vol. 5, Michael Psellos: Historikoi Logoi, Epistolai, kai Alla Anekdotata* (Venice, 1872; repr. Hildesheim, 1972),

π. 7: ὅπου δὲ τὴν μητέρα λάθοι τὰς τῶν γραμμάτων ἀρχὰς παρὰ τοῦ μόνου λαβοῦσα, εἶτα δι' ἃς ἐαυτῆς συνετίθει, καὶ συλλαβὰς ἐποίει καὶ λόγους, μηδὲν προσδεομένη τοῦ στοιχειώσαντος. See also a new translation of Psellos' works on his mother and daughter: Anthony Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (Notre Dame, 2006).

⁵⁴ My translation of Michael Psellos, *Εἰς τὴν θυγατέρα Στυλιανὴν πρὸ ὥρας γάμου τελευτήσασαν*, (ed.) Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothek: Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*: Vol. 5, p. 65: οὕτω τοι καὶ στοιχειωδῶν ἤπτετο γραμμάτων, καὶ μίξεως συλλαβῶν, καὶ ονομάτων συνθήκης, ἅψ' ὧν προκαταρτισθεῖσα τὸν νοῦν, καὶ Δαυϊτικοῖς ψαλμοῖς ἐνεβίβαζετο.

⁵⁵ Michael Psellos, (ed.) Sathas, *Mesaionike Bibliothek: Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*: Vol. 5, p. 66.

⁵⁶ A. Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 31 (1981): pp. 233–60, at 253 (published along with A. Laiou, 'Addendum to the Report on the Role of Women in Byzantine Society', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 32 (1982): pp. 198–204).

⁵⁷ For female monasticism in this era see, besides the articles cited below: D.Z.de F. Abrahamse, 'Women's Monasticism in the Middle Byzantine Period: Problems and Prospects', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 35–58.

⁵⁸ A. Laiou, 'Observations on the Life and Ideology of Byzantine Women', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 59–102, at 82.

⁵⁹ Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', p. 253.

⁶⁰ E. Jeffreys, 'The Sevastokratorissa Eirene as Literary Patroness: The Monk Iakovos', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 32.3 (1982): pp. 63–71, at 64.

⁶¹ J. Herrin, 'In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach', in Av. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (eds), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London, 1983), pp. 167–89, at 175.

⁶² G. Buckler, 'Women in Byzantine Law: About 1100 AD', *Byzantion*, 11 (1936): pp. 391–416, at 395.

⁶³ Browning, 'Literacy in the Byzantine World', p. 50.

⁶⁴ G. Buckler, *Anna Comnena: A Study* (London, 1929), p. 165, translated from the text of B. Leib, *Anna Comnène. Alexiade* (Paris, 1937–45), Προοίμιον, 1.2: οὐ γραμμάτων οὐκ ἄμοιρος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνίζειν ἐς ἄκρον ἐσπουδακῦα καὶ ῥητορικῆς οὐκ ἄμελετήτως ἔχουσα καὶ τὰς Ἀριστοτελικὰς τέχνας εὖ ἀναλεξαμένη καὶ τοὺς Πλάτωνος διαλόγους καὶ τὸν νοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς τετρακτύος τῶν μαθημάτων πυκάσασα. See also the papers collected in Th. Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (New York, 2000).

⁶⁵ Buckler, *Anna Comnena: A Study*, p. 168, translated from Leib, *Alexiade*, 5.9.3: Μέννημαι τῆς μητρὸς καὶ βασιλίδος πολλὰκις ἀρίστου προκειμένου βιβλὸν ἐν χερσὶν φερούσης καὶ τοὺς λόγους διερευνημένης τῶν δογματιστῶν ἁγίων πατέρων, μάλιστα δὲ τοῦ φιλοσόφου Μαξίμου καὶ μάρτυρος.

⁶⁶ Quoted by A.-M.M., Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns: Intellectual Life in the Convents of Late Byzantium', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983): pp. 604–18, at 605, n. 7. See also Talbot, 'Late Byzantine Nuns: By Choice or Necessity?', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 103–17. For this and other Byzantine *typika* see J. Thomas and A.C. Hero (trans.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* (Washington, DC, 2000).

⁶⁷ Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', p. 608.

⁶⁸ C. Galatariotou, 'Byzantine Women's Monastic Communities: The Evidence of the ΤΥΠΙΚΑ', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 38 (1988): pp. 263–90, at

⁶⁹ George Sphrantzes, *Chronicon* 18, 2, (ed.) V. Grecu, *Georgios Sphrantzes Memorii, Cronica* (Bucharest, 1966), p. 32, in Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', p. 607, n. 18.

⁷⁰ Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', p. 614.

⁷¹ Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', p. 253.

⁷² Browning, 'Literacy in the Byzantine World', p. 50.

⁷³ For one woman's reading see M.E. Mullett, 'The 'Disgrace' of the ex-Basilissa Maria', *Byzantine Studies*, 45 (1984): pp. 202–11; for the reading habits of many women see the books collected by A. Weyl Carr, *Byzantine Illumination, 1150–1250: The Study of a Provincial Tradition* (Chicago, 1987), p. 205.

⁷⁴ Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', p. 250.

⁷⁵ Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', p. 246.

⁷⁶ Laiou, 'The Role of Women in Byzantine Society', p. 259.

⁷⁷ G. Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances* (New York, 1995), p. 133.

⁷⁸ Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', 606.

⁷⁹ R. Nelson and J. Lowden, 'The Palaeologina Group: Additional Manuscripts and New Questions', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 45 (1991): pp. 59–68, at 59.

⁸⁰ Talbot, 'Bluestocking Nuns', p. 607.

⁸¹ A.C. Hero, 'Irene-Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina, Abbess of the Convent of Philanthropos Soter in Constantinople', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 9 (1985): pp. 119–57, at 135.

Chapter 5

Changing Conceptions of Mary in Sixth-Century Byzantium: The *Kontakia* of Romanos the Melodist

Sarah Gador-Whyte

One Christmas eve, the Holy Theotokos appeared to [Romanos] in a dream and handed him a roll of papyrus and ordered him to eat it. After swallowing it, straightaway he awoke, and having gone up into the *ambo*, he began to proclaim and sing most melodiously ... ¹

This story, which survives only in documents dated several centuries after the death of sixth-century hymnographer Romanos the Melodist, combines biblical and classical notions of inspiration. Classical poets, perhaps most famously Homer, claimed inspiration from the Muses for their poetic works.² The image of scroll-swallowing is reminiscent of Revelation 10:9–11, in which the angel tells John to eat the scroll and then prophesy. Romanos cannot prophesy, but is inspired to sing what was to become his most popular *kontakion*. In the *Synaxaria*, Mary plays the roles of Muse and angel.

The tradition of the Virgin Mary as Romanos' Muse and scroll-holding angel may be a consequence of the prominence of Mary in his *kontakia*. While that is pure conjecture, Romanos does seem to find Mary a particularly interesting, helpful and *flexible* character. Mary plays numerous roles in the *kontakia*, ranging from doubtful human to Queen, from caring mother to holy Theotokos, from blameless virgin to protector of the world. Romanos' representations of Mary are extremely varied, perhaps more so than other writers in the period, pointing to a particularly complex conception of her character. I cannot investigate each of these characterisations here, but it is worth stressing this diversity of roles at the outset. This paper focuses on Mary as Theotokos, protector, intercessor, and ordinary, caring mother. In each case I will look at how Romanos' characterisations reflect changes in conceptions of Mary in sixth-century Byzantium as well as possible implications for late-antique gender depictions.

Theotokos

I begin with Mary as Theotokos, or 'God-bearer'.³ The word appears at

least 30 times in Romanos' 59 genuine *kontakia*.⁴ In *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary* it is repeated in the refrain:⁵

Ἡ στειρά τίκτει τὴν θεοτόκον
καὶ τροφὸν τῆς ζωῆς ἡμῶν.

[The barren women gives birth to the Theotokos
and the one who nourishes our life.]

Anna, who was said to be barren, has given birth to the God-bearer who will nurse humanity through her motherhood.⁶ Anna's barrenness functions in this *kontakion* in a similar way to Mary's virginity, emphasising through paradox the creative power of God displayed in the incarnation.

Romanos associates 'Theotokos' with παρθένος ('virgin') at least six times. Jesus' divinity is signified by Mary's virginity; the Theotokos' virginity, like Anna's barrenness, demonstrates God's creative power. The use of the terms 'God-bearer' and 'virgin' thus primarily makes claims about the Father and the Son. Yet in emphasising, through juxtaposition, that Mary is both human virgin and perfect God-bearer, Mary is also elevated to special prominence, and the elevation of Mary through her virginity also, of course, raised the status of virginity and asceticism in early Christianity.

Earlier preachers and theologians also juxtaposed these terms.⁷ Price points out that Athanasius and Ambrose use the term Theotokos to emphasise Mary's virginity, making her into a model for Christian ascetics.⁸ Gregory of Nyssa also uses Mary thus in his treatise *On Virginity* (14.1). Romanos' use of the term in this context is not original. However, for Gregory, Athanasius and Ambrose (and their contemporaries) the term was not controversial in the way it came to be later. Previously the term linked Mary to God, illustrating her blessed state and close connection with God,⁹ but in the fifth century the Christological import of 'Theotokos' became especially prominent.¹⁰ We may read Romanos' use of the term as more pointed within this context, even as it displays continuity with the earlier tradition.

In *On the Presentation in the Temple* Mary as Theotokos is a champion for orthodoxy, providing a link to Christological controversies. The hymn addresses the mystery of the incarnation, the two natures of Christ and how they relate to each other, the inseparability of Christ from the Father, and the importance of the crucifixion for human salvation. Such questions were prominent in contemporary theological debates.¹¹ Romanos frames this very doctrinal *kontakion* with the Theotokos. The first line of the *kontakion* calls the congregation to participate in the life of the Theotokos

(4.α'.1–2):

Τῇ θεοτόκῳ προσδράμωμεν οἱ βουλόμενοι
κατιδεῖν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς
πρὸς Συμεὼν ἀπαγόμενον·

[Let us rush to the Theotokos, we who wish
to see her son
brought before Simeon.]

Christians are called to participate in the life of Christ, and Romanos makes the Theotokos the vehicle of that participation. We see Christ through the Theotokos.

In the final strophe, the Theotokos is an intercessor for humanity: ταῖς πρεσβείαις τῆς ἀχράντου θεοτόκου καὶ παρθένου (4.ιη'.6). Once again, the Theotokos leads us to God, mediating for us with the divine. Associated with this mediating function is Romanos' use of 'Theotokos' to emphasise Mary's connection to human salvation. In *On Joseph II* (44.κβ'.13–15) he says:

ῥῦσαι κάμέ, Χριστέ, τυραννούμενον,
ἵνα σωθῶ διὰ τῆς θεοτόκου,
ὡς Ἰωσήφ ὁ πιστός σου θεράπων ...

[Keep me, O Christ, from being subject to tyranny,
so that I might be saved, through the Theotokos,
to be your faithful servant, as Joseph was ...]

Salvation comes through Mary in this *kontakion* which focuses on Potiphar's wife and Joseph's rejection of her. One woman was a temptress, sinful and human, and would have been Joseph's downfall. In comparison, Romanos emphasises, through the term Theotokos, the salvation that comes through a very different figure, whose potentially negative femininity is made perfect by her close connection with God. Mary, by being the God-bearer, reverses the harm done by other women (Eve, Potiphar's wife) and brings humans to salvation, rather than damnation. Here the term Theotokos emphasises Mary's connection to God which allows her to escape the curse of her sex and become a suitable means of salvation.

Protector

Romanos' Theotokos is also the protector of the orthodox. Seventh-century evidence shows Mary as masculine protector of

Constantinople, in her appearance at the Avar siege of 626.¹² Before Romanos, the image of Mary as protector appeared in the *Akathistos* hymn:¹³

Τείχος εἰ τῶν παρθένων, θεοτόκε παρθένε,
καὶ πάντων τῶν εἰς σέ προσφευγόντων (19.1–2)

[You are a fortification for virgins, O Virgin Theotokos,
and for all who flee to you.]

χαίρε, τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀσάλευτος πύργος·
χαίρε, τῆς βασιλείας τὸ ἀπόρρητον τεῖχος·
χαίρε, δι' ἧς ἐγείρονται τρόπαια·
χαίρε, δι' ἧς ἐχθροὶ καταπίπτουσι (23.12–15)

[Hail, unshaken tower of the church,
Hail, unravaged wall of the empire,
Hail, you through whom victory monuments are erected,
Hail, you through whom our enemies fall.]

Vasiliki Limberis has argued that such fortification and protection images arise from a change in the notion of city deities.¹⁴ Cities had been protected by deities like Tyche, whose statue stood in Constantinople and who was associated with both the foundation of Byzantium and the city's on-going protection.¹⁵ Other goddesses were also associated with Constantinople. Hecate, who had also been associated with the city since its foundation, seems to have been connected to the city walls. Pallas Athena is yet another.¹⁶

Limberis argues that the *Akathistos* hymn's Virgin has taken on aspects of the roles of pagan deities like these. This connection between the Theotokos and the protection of Constantinople is strengthened in the early seventh century when she is credited with saving the city from the Avars, just as Zosimus' Athena had protected the walls of Athens (*Historia Nova* 5.6.1–2). Mary is said to have appeared on the walls of Constantinople, further connecting her with city deities like Athena and Hecate.

Between the composition of the *Akathistos* and 626, and perhaps indicating the idea's development, we have Romanos, who sees the Virgin particularly as a protector of Christians. Romanos may be appropriating an existing *topos* of a goddess protector, influenced by the *Akathistos* and earlier pagan depictions. In *On the Nativity I*, Mary is a fortress, the protector of all humanity (1.κγ'.4–6):

ἐποίησάς με ὄλου τοῦ γένους μου καὶ στόμα καὶ καύχημα·
ἐμέ γὰρ ἔχει ἡ οἰκουμένη σου
σκέπην κραταιάν, τεῖχος καὶ στήριγμα·

[You made me both mouth and boast of my whole race,
for your inhabited world has me
as a mighty shelter, wall and support.]

The image is one of military protection and support. σκέπη and τεῖχος together might conjure up images of fortress and battle, and στήριγμα can refer to the foundations of a building as well as the support one person might give to another.

Mary is once again a wall and specifically the protector of Christians in *On the Nativity of the Virgin Mary* (35.1'.3–5):

αὐτὴ γὰρ τεῖχος καὶ στήριγμα καὶ λιμὴν τῶν ἐπ' αὐτῇ
πεποιθότων ὑπάρχει,
ἣν πᾶς Χριστιανὸς ἔξει προστασίαν
καὶ σκέπην σωτηρίας καὶ ἐλπίδα

[For she is a wall and foundation and harbour for those
who trust in her.
Every Christian has her as protection
and shelter and hope of salvation.]

τεῖχος and στήριγμα recur in this passage, giving, once again, a sense of strong and possibly military support as well as comfort and protection.

These images could be seen to draw on Mary's femininity. The image of the wall suggests a protecting fortress which surrounds and encloses the city. It embraces the city. The depiction of the Theotokos as the enclosing or embracing wall suggests motherly protection: a very feminine image. The harbour, similarly, is a motherly image. It is a place of safety and conveys similar ideas of embracing. It can be used to refer to a womb.¹⁷ Yet these images also symbolise Mary's virginity. Like the strong fortress walls, which stand firm and are not breached, Mary is perfect virgin, inviolate and unpenetrated. Yet, although these feminine associations are no doubt operating, the active, martial, masculine character of the images remains. Like Zosimus' Athena and descriptions of the Theotokos in 626, Romanos' Mary is a military protector who battles for Christians. The hope of salvation she provides is set in a military context. She, the great commander or protector, will save humanity in the battle against evil.

Intercessor

Mary the commander is also the 'mouth' of the human race (cf. 1. κγ'. 4). Romanos often presents Mary as one who speaks for humanity,

interceding with God on behalf of mortals. Many such instances are formulaic and occur in the final strophe of the *kontakion*, which is often a prayer.¹⁸ For instance, in *On the Healing of the Leper* Romanos concludes the hymn with (8.17'.6–10):

... δὸς ἡμῖν ἀντίληψιν
πρεσβείαις τῆς θεοτόκου καὶ παρθένου Μαρίας,
δι' ἧς σοι προσιόντες πάντες παρακαλοῦμεν·
‘Ἐλέησον’, βοῶντες,
‘ὥς φιλόανθρωπος.’

[... grant us redemption
through the prayers of the Theotokos and Virgin Mary,
through whom we all approach and call out,
crying out, ‘Have mercy on us,
O lover of humanity.’]

The Theotokos prays on behalf of humanity, and humanity prays to her as an intermediary with God. Mary’s intercessory role is figured as divinely ordained. In *On Mary at the Cross* Christ tells Mary to be an intercessor (19.8'.7–10):

... μὴ κλαύσης οὖν, μήτερ,
μᾶλλον τοῦτο κράζον· ‘τὸν Ἀδὰμ ἐλέησον
καὶ τὴν Εὐὰν οἴκτειρον,
ὁ υἱὸς καὶ θεὸς μου.’

[... so do not weep, mother,
but rather cry this: ‘Have mercy on Adam
and take pity on Eve,
my son and my God.’]

For Romanos, the intercessory role is so central to Mary’s character that God himself gives it to her. Mary is likewise an intercessor in *On the Nativity II*, where Adam recognises her power to help free him from his bondage and asks her to hear his lamentations. Mary is greatly moved and agrees to act as an ambassador for her ancestors (2. 1').

The prominence of Mary as intercessor is somewhat surprising, since Mary does not seem to take an intercessory role in contemporary Greek homiletics. Phrases such as Romanos uses (e.g. ‘through the intercessions of the Theotokos’) are almost non-existent in other fifth- and sixth-century Greek writers.¹⁹ As a preacher, Romanos may be an innovator.

However, the formulaic nature of many of these characterisations seems to suggest otherwise. In at least 12 of the *kontakia* the final

strophe contains a line like ‘through the intercessions of the one who bore you’ or ‘through the prayers of the holy Theotokos and Virgin’.²⁰ Romanos must have expected these words to resonate with the congregation, which suggests that rather than being entirely innovative, he is expressing something which existed already, perhaps in popular piety, as Shoemaker has argued in the context of early Dormition narratives.²¹

Mary seems to have been the object of petitions on lead seals from the early Byzantine period, and women called upon her for help in childbirth through the use of amulets.²² She came to be considered as the most effective intercessor before God.²³ The reign of Justinian had more than its fair share of problems. Averil Cameron argues that the sixth-century image of Mary as intercessor appears when the people of Constantinople were in desperate need of intercession.²⁴ In this climate it is no surprise that Romanos uses an intercessory formula at the end of many of his hymns.

Yet the rarity of the image in Greek homiletics suggests that another possible factor in the depiction of Mary as intercessor is influence from Syriac homiletics.²⁵ Jacob of Serugh sometimes portrays Mary as one who intercedes on behalf of humanity. Towards the end of his *Homily concerning the Burial*, he says:²⁶

The name of Christ the King who was crucified on Golgotha,
grants life and sheds forth mercy on the one who invokes Him.
And also on me a sinner who is not capable of praising her,
the Mother of mercy, who brought You forth in the flesh.
O Son of God, by her prayers make your peace to dwell
in heaven, in the depths, and among all the counsels of her sons.

Such a call for mercy, mediated by the Virgin’s prayers, is not unlike Romanos’ references to Mary’s prayers in the final strophes of several *kontakia*. While direct influence cannot be traced, contemporary Syriac culture may have influenced Romanos’ presentation of Mary as intercessor.

Romanos suggests that it is partly Mary’s role as loving mother that makes her a good intercessor. Despite her son’s insistence that Mary not weep in *On Mary at the Cross* (19.6’7–10, quoted above), Romanos uses emotions to characterise her intercession. She is compassionate and has pity on humanity, asking her son to save his creation. Mary’s emotions are depicted when Adam asks her to pity her ancestors, stuck in Hades (2.1’1–8):

Οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ δὲ Μαρίας τὴν Εὐὰν θεωρήσαντες
καὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ κατιδόντες δακρύειν κατηπείγοντο·
ὅμως στέγει καὶ σπουδάζει

νικᾶν τὴν φύσιν ἢ παρὰ φύσιν τὸν Χριστὸν σχοῦσα υἱόν·
ἀλλὰ τὰ σπλάγχχα ἐταράττετο γονεῦσι συμπάσχουσα·
τῷ γὰρ ἐλεήμονι μῆτηρ ἔπρεπεν εὐσπλαγξος·
διὸ πρὸς αὐτοὺς: «Παύσασθε τῶν θρήνων ὑμῶν,
καὶ πρέσβις ὑμῖν γίνομαι πρὸς τὸν ἐξ ἐμοῦ ... »

[The eyes of Mary, looking down and observing Eve
and Adam, began to shed tears.

Yet she holds back [the tears] and pays attention to the one she holds,
contrary to nature, her son the Christ, who has conquered nature.

But her heart was troubled, sympathizing with her ancestors,
for the mother shone forth in pity, being compassionate.

Therefore she [said] to them, ‘Stop your lamentations,
and I will be an ambassador for you to the one [born] from me ...]

Mary feels real compassion for Adam and Eve. Their plight brings her to tears, which she fights back as she contemplates her miraculous son. Her pity overcomes her and she intercedes with her infant son for her ancestors. Mary’s overwhelming emotional response might be seen as a very feminine, and perhaps even motherly, reaction. Romanos emphasises this connection between motherhood and compassion by the juxtaposition of ἐλεήμονι and μῆτηρ in line 6. It seems that this emotional presentation may have been somewhat unusual. Peltomaa argues that Proclus of Constantinople, for instance, is not interested in creating an emotional personality for the Virgin.²⁷ Romanos may thus be part of a new perception of Mary as the compassionate mother. Romanos’ portrayal of Mary claims that it is this femininity and motherliness which makes Mary an effective intercessor.

This weeping, compassionate mother is not unlike the image of Mary as *mater dolorosa* which, although only depicted after iconoclasm in Greek iconography, is certainly present in Romanos.²⁸ *Mater dolorosa* was not a prominent depiction of Mary in this period, but Jacob of Serugh dramatically portrays Mary as the weeping mother, and as in the more general image of Mary as intercessor, the culture which helped to shape his compositions may also have influenced Romanos.²⁹

Ordinary Mother

This characterisation of Mary as weeping mother is one aspect of Romanos’ presentation of the Virgin as, in the words of Roger Scott, the ‘suburban mum’ or ordinary mother. Two *kontakia* best illustrate this characterisation. As we saw above, Romanos opens the *kontakion On the Presentation in the Temple* with an invitation to the congregation

to rush and see the Theotokos bring her son before Simeon (4.α'.1–2). As well as being an important aspect of his participatory theology, these two lines bring the Theotokos very close to the congregation. It is almost as if she is a well-known local figure who lives around the corner from the church and with whom the members of the congregation are all reasonably well acquainted. Something exciting is happening in the neighbourhood and Romanos encourages everyone to rush off and see it. Despite the use of the term Theotokos, which we might see as very formal and doctrinal, such passages create a sense of familiarity with the Virgin and characterise her as an ordinary human being.

The weeping mother is also referred to in this hymn. Simeon tells Mary that she will see her son crucified and that the suffering will be like a sword for her (4.ιγ'), which is a reference to Luke 2:35. Interpretation of this biblical passage has been notoriously difficult. Alonso helpfully summarises the different interpretations throughout the ages, demonstrating the tradition which connects the 'sword' with Mary's grief at her son's crucifixion.³⁰ Basil, for example, in his letter to the bishop Optimus, says that Simeon prophesied Mary's extreme grief, which would be like a violent storm within her.³¹ Romanos fits into this tradition, specifically connecting the 'sword' with Mary's lament at the cross.³²

Romanos also creates a picture of Mary as a caring, loving mother in this hymn. She speaks to the baby Jesus with tenderness, love and awe. This picture of the perfect, loving mother fits with sixth-century ideas of female roles. One of Justinian's laws on remarriage states that 'nature made women for the purpose of producing offspring, and that is their greatest desire.'³³ It was not only expected that women would have children, but that this would be their 'greatest desire', the highlight of their lives. Romanos plays into these ideals in his depictions of Mary in this *kontakion*.

Romanos' most extended characterisation of Mary as an ordinary mother occurs in *On Mary at the Cross*. In this hymn Mary speaks to Christ as he hangs on the cross (19.α'.1–7):

Τὸν ἴδιον ἄρνα [ῆ] ἀμνάς θεωροῦσα
 πρὸς σφαγὴν ἐλκόμενον ἠκολούθει <ῆ> Μαρία τρυχομένη
 μεθ' ἐτέρων γυναικῶν ταῦτα βοῶσα·
 'Ποῦ πορεύῃ, τέκνον; τίνος χάριν τὸν ταχύν
 δρόμον τελέεις;
 μὴ ἕτερος γάμος πάλιν ἔστιν ἐν Κανᾷ,
 κάκει νυνὶ σπεύδεις, ἵν' ἐξ ὕδατος αὐτοῖς οἶνον ποιήσης;
 συνέλθω σοι, τέκνον, ἢ μείνω σε μᾶλλον;

[Seeing her own lamb being dragged to slaughter,

Mary the ewe-lamb, worn out, followed
with the other women, crying out,
‘Where are you going, my son? For the sake of whom do you
complete the fast race?
Is there again another wedding in Cana,
and do you hurry there now, in order to make wine out of water for them?
Shall I go with you, my son, or rather wait for you?’]

Mary does not understand why her son is being crucified. She tries to relate what is happening to their previous joint experience: Is there another wedding at Cana? That was a marvellous deed which she could understand. That was also an event to which they went together. Like many mothers, Mary does not want to part from her son. There are other examples of this throughout the hymn. The Virgin recalls events in their life together and wonders why this event cannot be like them: why does Jesus have to die to raise humanity, when he raised Lazarus without any harm to himself? (19.η’.) Romanos depicts Mary as a very human mother through such questions. Yet he also presents Mary as somewhat subconsciously connecting the wedding at Cana with the crucifixion and resurrection, as John does in his Gospel.³⁴ Cana is one of the signs which points to the coming crucifixion. In that story Jesus says to his mother, ‘my hour has not yet come’ (John 2:4).³⁵ Mary’s recollection of the wedding at the cross suggests that she wishes to return to a time when her son’s hour had not yet come.

Some preachers believed Mary’s behaviour at the wedding at Cana showed her ignorance of her son’s power.³⁶ Romanos does not concur with this view, presenting Mary instead as recalling a demonstration of her son’s power with which she is comfortable. In this sense Romanos fits better with interpreters like John Chrysostom and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who argued that Mary was aware of Jesus’ power from the beginning.³⁷

The motherliness again surfaces in the third strophe, in which Mary expresses anger at what she perceives as the fickleness of Jesus’ friends. They had promised to stand by her son and now that he is dying they are nowhere to be seen (19.γ’.1–8):

‘Υπάγεις, ὦ τέκνον, πρὸς ἄδικον φόνον
καὶ οὐδεὶς σοι συναλγεῖ· οὐ συνέρχεται σοι Πέτρος
ὁ εἰπὼν σοι·
‘οὐκ ἄρνούμαι σε ποτέ, κἂν ἀποθνήσκω’.
ἔλιπέ σε Θώμας ὁ βοήσας· ‘μετ’ αὐτοῦ θάνωμεν πάντες’.
οἱ ἄλλοι δὲ πάλιν, οἱ οἰκεῖοι καὶ γνωστοὶ
καὶ μέλλοντες κρίνειν τὰς φυλὰς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, ποῦ εἰσιν ἄρτι;
οὐδεὶς ἐκ τῶν πάντων, ἄλλ’ εἰς ὑπὲρ πάντων
θνήσκεις, τέκνον, μόνος ...

[You are led, my son, to unjust slaughter,
and no one suffers with you. Peter is not going with you, although he said, 'I
will
never deny you, even though I might be put to death.'
Thomas has left you, who cried, 'We will all die with you.'
And the rest too [have left you], your friends and companions,
and those who will judge the tribes of Israel, where are they now?
Not one of all of them, but you on behalf of all,
are dying, my son, alone ...]

This frustration that her son's friends do not live up to her standards likewise characterises Mary as the 'suburban mum'. She knows her son's worth and wants his friends to appreciate him as she does. At the end, as Romanos has it, the only person who does not desert Jesus is his loyal mother.

Once Jesus has explained why he needs to die, Mary wants to know, firstly, whether her son will return to her, and if not, whether she can follow him. She says (19.1α'.5–10):

ἄν πάθῃς, ἄν θάνῃς, ἀναλύσεις πρὸς ἐμέ;
ἄν περιοδεύσῃς σὺν τῇ Εὐᾷ τὸν Ἀδάμ, βλέψω σε πάλιν;
αὐτὸ γὰρ φοβοῦμαι, μήπως ἐκ τοῦ τάφου
ἄνω δράμῃς, τέκνον, καὶ ζητοῦσα σέ ἰδεῖν
κλαύσω, κράξω· 'ποῦ ἐστίν
ὁ υἱὸς καὶ θεὸς μου;'

[If you suffer, if you die, will you return to me?
If you heal Adam and Eve, will I see you again?
For this is what I am afraid of, lest from the tomb
you rush straight up, my child, and I, seeking to see you,
will weep and cry out, 'Where are you,
my son and my God?']

Once again we have an emotional Mary, who cannot bear the idea of being separated from her beloved son. Mary focuses on herself, what Jesus' death will mean for *her*. She does not doubt her son's ability to save her forebears, or the certainty of the resurrection. Her faith in him is secure. She knows her son, his worth and abilities. Rather, Mary expresses a fear of loneliness and separation from her son. She will be alone on earth once he ascends to heaven. We know from the rest of the *kontakion* that she is aware of the importance of Jesus' death for the salvation of humanity, but as his mother she can only think about her desire to see her son alive again. Later, she says (19.1ε'.2–4):

καὶ οὐ στέγω ἀληθῶς, ἴν' ἐγὼ μὲν ἐν θαλάμῳ,
σύ δ' ἐν ξύλῳ,

καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ἐν οἰκίᾳ, σὺ δ' ἐν μνημείῳ·
ἄφες οὖν συνέλθω· θεραπεύει γὰρ ἐμὲ τὸ θεωρεῖν σε·

[And truly I cannot bear that I should be in my room,
but you on the tree,
and I in my house, but you in the tomb.
So let me come with you, for to see you heals me.]

The loyal mother cannot bear to see her son suffer without feeling that she should take part in that suffering. The idea that she should be in comfort at home while he hangs on the cross or lies in the tomb is repulsive to her and so she wants to go with him, irrespective of the consequences. What Romanos means by this final line is somewhat unclear. He may have been influenced by Ephrem in his depiction of the lamenting Mary.³⁸ Dobrov suggests that there is a hint of the suicidal expressions of later laments, in which Mary is so overcome by grief that she cannot bear to live.³⁹ Romanos may be one of the first Greek writers to present Mary thus, and, although not explicitly expressing a death wish, may well have influenced later writers who presented Mary as suicidal.⁴⁰ Alexiou argues that both the *troparia* on this theme attributed to Leo VI and Symeon Metaphrastes' *Planctus* show evidence of the influence of Romanos' *On Mary at the Cross*.⁴¹ It is also possible that, in the passage above, Romanos refers to Mary's Dormition, which, along with other Marian feasts, was beginning to be celebrated in this period.⁴² Jesus grants Mary her request, allowing her to ascend to heaven and be with him after his resurrection. As Shoemaker points out, there were early Dormition and Assumption narratives circulating in the fourth century, but it was in the sixth century that the feasts were formalised.⁴³ Romanos' *kontakion* thus fits into the developing tradition of the Dormition.

Conclusion

Romanos' Mary is a multifaceted character. We have seen only four sides of her here: Theotokos, Protector, Intercessor, and Mother. The diversity of images used for Mary is evidence in part for the burgeoning developments in the Marian cult in this period,⁴⁴ and in part a function of how imagery works in poetry, with different symbols, metaphors and images resonating in different contexts. Yet there is also substantial coherence to the four main images of Mary that I have investigated. Romanos elevates Mary as Theotokos almost to divinity, emphasising her importance for human salvation. Her significance is as an intermediary between humans and God. Humans can approach God through her. Her roles as Theotokos and Intercessor

are thus intimately linked. She was given the role of mediator as an appropriate role for a caring, emotionally involved mother, but her semi-divinity also makes her a particularly powerful mediator. She is thus the bearer of orthodoxy to humanity as well as the bearer of humanity to God. As bearer of orthodoxy she is protector of the orthodox whom she brings to God. Romanos portrays her as a strong, military, and very masculine, defender of Christians. Humankind has her as a bastion, a protection against evil. Gendered depictions of Mary are polyvalent and do not capture her within merely stereotypical images of femininity. Yet Romanos' image of Mary as Protector has both masculine and feminine overtones. She protects her own strongly; yet the image of protection also resonates with feminine depictions of Mary. The images of Mary as military champion and embracing, motherly protector thus cohere through different, gendered depictions of Mary. Romanos particularly emphasises Mary's femininity in his presentation of her as an ordinary, human mother. He creates a homely image of her as a neighbour to the congregation. Her concerns for her son, her passionate loyalty and love for him, her desire for his homecoming, and her lack of complete comprehension about his actions, are part of Romanos' presentation of Mary as the ideal yet very human mother, a depiction which also coheres with Mary as intercessor and mediator. And here we have come full circle from the semi-divine portrayal of Mary Theotokos to the very human depiction of the weeping, human mother. These four characterisations, which overlap and are interwoven throughout the *kontakia*, illustrate not only changing conceptions of Mary but also the expansion of Mary's role in late-antique Christianity.

1 For the Greek text, see José Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris, 1977), p. 162. All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

2 *Iliad* 1.1 ('Sing, Goddess, about the wrath of Achilles, Peleus' son ...'); *Odyssey* 1.1 ('Tell me, Muse, about the much-travelled man ...') (my translations).

3 On the early use of this term, see Marek Starowieyski, 'Le titre Θεοτόκος avant le concile d'Ephèse', *Studia Patristica*, 19 (1989): pp. 236–42; J.A. McGuckin, 'The Paradox of the Virgin-Theotokos: Evangelism and Imperial Politics in the Fifth-Century Byzantine World', *Maria*, 2.1 (2001): pp. 8–25; R.M. Price, 'The Theotokos and the Council of Ephesus', in C. Maunder (ed.), *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London; New York, 2008), pp. 89–103. Wright rightly stresses the importance of translating Theotokos as 'God-bearer' and not 'Mother of God': D.F. Wright, 'From "God-Bearer" to "Mother of God" in the Later Fathers', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary, Studies in Church History* (Woodbridge, 2004), p. 22.

4 59 are considered genuine by the Oxford editors: Paul Maas and Konstantinos Trypanis (eds), *Romanos, Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina* (Oxford, 1963) (all quotes from Romanos are taken from this edition). The Sources chrétiennes edition includes a few others: *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, (ed. and trans.) José Grosdidier de Matons, Sources chrétiennes, 99, 110, 114, 128, 283 (5 vols, Paris, 1964–81). There are approximately another 30 instances of 'Theotokos' in the *dubia* and in titles and *prooimia* of genuine *kontakia*, but since these were probably not written by Romanos, I have excluded them from my analysis. Romanos may be somewhat unusual in the number of times he uses the term. On epithets for Mary in sixth- and seventh-century homiletics, see P. Allen, 'Portrayals of Mary in Greek Homiletic Literature (6th–7th Centuries)', in L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham (eds), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 69–88.

5 That is, in the seventh line of every strophe of *kontakion* 35. These make up 11 of the 30 instances.

6 Price argues that the term is often used without particular emphasis in fourth-century texts, as it seems to be here: R.M. Price, 'Theotokos: The Title and Its Significance in Doctrine and Devotion', in S.J. Boss (ed.), *Mary: The Complete Resource* (London; New York, 2007), p. 57.

7 e.g. Athanasius' orations against Arius, PG 26, 385.

8 Price, 'Theotokos: The Title', p. 57.

9 Peltomaa argues that the term is used in the *Akathistos* hymn's first strophe to emphasise the physical connection between Mary and Jesus: L.M. Peltomaa, 'Epithets of the Theotokos in the Akathistos Hymn', in Brubaker and Cunningham (eds), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium*, pp. 180–81.

10 Gregory of Nyssa already seems to use the term to emphasise Christ's divinity in his letter to Eustathia, Ambrosia, and Basilissa, *Epistle* 3.24, (ed.) P. Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse, Lettres*, Sources chrétiennes, 363 (Paris, 1990), pp. 124–7. However, it is not until the fifth century that controversy surrounding the term really developed.

11 On the so-called 'monophysite' controversy: W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1972). On the term 'Theotokos' and its links to the Christological controversies of the fifth century: McGuckin, 'The Paradox of the Virgin-Theotokos'; R.M. Price, 'Marian Piety and Nestorian Controversy', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary, Studies in Church History* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 31–8; Price, 'The Theotokos and the Council of Ephesus'.

¹² Cf. George of Pisidia's *Bellum Avaricum*, in which Mary is the 'Virgin Commander' (ἡ στρατηγὸς Παρθένος) (ed. and trans.) A. Pertusi, *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi I: Panegirici epici*, Studia Patristica et Byzantina, 7 (Ettal, 1959), line 445. See also Averil Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople', *Journal of Theological Studies, new series*, 29 (1978): pp. 79–108, at 79, 89; Price, 'Marian Piety and Nestorian Controversy', p. 32.

¹³ I do not believe that Romanos was the author of this hymn, and most recent scholarship seems to agree. See, for example, J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines*, pp. 34–6. Limberis has argued that it could have been written by Proclus of Constantinople: V. Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London, 1994), p. 92. The evidence is not conclusive, however. Pentcheva argues against this hypothesis, suggesting that the *Akathistos* may have been inspired by Proclus, but moves beyond his image: B.V. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (University Park, 2006), p. 14. Peltomaa likewise argues against authorship by Proclus, but suggests he may have commissioned it: L.M. Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*, The Medieval Mediterranean (Leiden; Boston, 2001), p. 113. Constan, on the other hand, argues for a later dating of the *Akathistos*, and criticises Peltomaa for assuming that Proclus' rhetoric would so quickly have been taken up by hymn-writers: N. Constan, 'Review of Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn*', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 49.3 (2005): pp. 357–8.

¹⁴ For the following, see Limberis, *Divine Heiress*, pp. 122–9; Pentcheva, *Icons and Power*, pp. 11–14. It is, however, hard to know the extent of influence of pagan deities on the cult of Mary. Cameron argues that we do not have explicit evidence for the influence of such pagan goddesses on depictions of Mary: Averil Cameron, 'The Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Religious Development and Myth-Making', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary, Studies in Church History* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 1–21, at p. 13. McGuckin acknowledges that although certain elements of Mary's depiction seem to come from pagan deities, this does not prove that they do. Some of these elements could have derived from the biblical and apocryphal traditions without any influence from pagan deities: J.A. McGuckin, 'The Early Cult of Mary and Inter-Religious Contexts in the Fifth-Century Church', in Maunder (ed.), *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, pp. 1–22, at 12.

¹⁵ These were by no means the only city deities. The emperor Julian argued that each nation or city had its own god, and which god it had depended on the characteristics of the nation. See Julian, *Against the Galileans* 115E, (ed. and trans.) W. Cave Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 3, LCL (Cambridge, MA; London, 1923), pp. 344–5.

¹⁶ Cameron, 'The Cult of the Virgin', p. 13.

¹⁷ e.g. Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, line 1208.

¹⁸ On Romanos' final prayers, see J.H. Barkhuizen, 'Romanos Melodos and the Composition of His Hymns: Prooimion and Final Strophe', *Hellenika*, 40 (1989): pp. 62–77; Barkhuizen, 'An Analysis of the Form and Content of Prayer as a Liturgical Component in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, 75.2 (1991): pp. 91–102.

¹⁹ TLG searches for the various combinations that Romanos uses (and comparable phrases) suggest that such formulae were almost unheard of in contemporary writings. Peltomaa suggests that Mary may have an intercessory role in the *Akathistos* hymn: Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, pp. 153–4. The image is hardly explicit, however.

²⁰ See 3.η'.12–13; 4.η'.6; 7.κα'.8; 8.η'.7; 11.κε'.7; 32.η'.10; 34.κδ'.7; 39.κδ'.3; 49.κβ'.10; 51.κδ'.9; 57.ιθ'.3; 58.η'.11. There are other instances not in final

strophes.

²¹ S.J. Shoemaker, 'Marian Liturgies and Devotion in Early Christianity', in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, (ed.) S.J. Boss (London; New York, 2007), pp. 130–45, at p. 135.

²² Cameron, 'The Cult of the Virgin', pp. 18–19.

²³ Cameron, 'The Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople', pp. 104.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ There is much debate over the extent of Syriac influence on Romanos. See S.P. Brock, 'Syriac and Greek Hymnography: Problems of Origin', *Studia Patristica*, 16 (1985): pp. 77–81; W.L. Petersen, *The Diatessaron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 475, Subsidia, 74 (Leuven, 1985); Petersen, 'The Dependence of Romanos the Melodist Upon the Syrian Ephrem: Its Importance for the Origin of the *Kontakion*', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 39.2 (1985): pp. 171–87; Manoulis Papoutsakis, 'The Making of a Syriac Fable: From Ephrem to Romanos', *Le Muséon*, 120 (2007): pp. 29–75. On relations between Greek- and Syriac-speaking communities, see S.P. Brock, 'Greek and Syriac in Late Antique Syria', in A.K. Bowman and G. Woolf (eds), *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 149–60.

²⁶ For the translation: Jacob of Serug, *On the Mother of God*, (trans.) Mary Hansbury (Crestwood, NY, 1998), p. 99. My italics. On Jacob's influence on Romanos, see Papoutsakis, 'The Making of a Syriac Fable', pp. 48–60, 72–4.

²⁷ Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary*, p. 65.

²⁸ Cameron, 'The Cult of the Virgin', p. 16; M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1976; repr. 1983), p. 209; Averil Cameron, 'Virginity as Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity', in Averil Cameron (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (London, 1989), pp. 181–205, at p. 190.

²⁹ On *mater dolorosa* in Jacob of Serugh and Romanos, see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, p. 209.

³⁰ P. Joaquín María Alonso, 'La espada de Simeón (Lc. 2, 35a) en la exégesis de los Padres', *Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariana, Rome*, 4 (1967): pp. 183–285.

³¹ Ep. 260, sections 6–9. See Alonos, 'La espada', 237–8.

³² Ibid., 251–2.

³³ *Codex Justinianus* 6.40.2: *Cum enim mulieres ad hoc natura progeniuit, ut partus ederent, et maxima eis cupiditas in hoc constituta est*. See Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford, 1993), p. 13.

³⁴ Cf. C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 299–300; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd edn, Philadelphia, 1978), pp. 189, 191. Smitmans helpfully outlines several scholars' interpretations of John 2:1–11 in relation to Mary: A. Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana. Die Auslegung von Jo 2, 1–11 bei den Vätern und heute*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese (Tübingen, 1966), pp. 54–63.

³⁵ See also Romanos' *kontakion* *On the Marriage at Cana*, 7.1'.

³⁶ Smitmans points to Eustathius as one such: Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana*, p. 93.

³⁷ Ibid. For the interpretations of other church fathers, see Smitmans, *Das Weinwunder von Kana*, pp. 94–7.

³⁸ Cf. M. Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (Cambridge, 1974), 63. J. Grosdidier de Matons also draws this connection: *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, vol. 4,

Sources chrétiennes, 128 (Paris, 1967), pp. 144–5. I have been unable to consult the French translation in G. Khouri-Sarkis, 'La Passion dans la liturgie syrienne occidentale', *L'Orient syrien*, 2 (1957): pp. 203–4.

³⁹ G.W. Dobrov, 'A Dialogue with Death: Ritual Lament and the *Threnos Theotokou* of Romanos Melodos', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 35.4 (1994): pp. 385–405, at 394.

⁴⁰ Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, pp. 63–5. John Chrysostom imagines that Mary's reaction to her unexplained pregnancy might have been a desire to kill herself out of shame, but this is quite different to the lamenting Mary who wishes to die because her son is dying. See *Hom. in Matt.* 4.5; *PG* 57, 45. See also L. Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, (trans.) T. Buffer (San Francisco, 1999), p. 173.

⁴¹ Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, pp. 63–5.

⁴² On the development of this feast, see Daley's introduction in Brian J. Daley (trans.), *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY, 1998), pp. 7–12.

⁴³ For early Dormition narratives, development of Marian devotion as evidenced by these narratives, and feasts which came to be associated with them, see S.J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York, 2002); Shoemaker, 'Marian Liturgies and Devotion in Early Christianity'; Shoemaker, 'Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 16.3 (2008): pp. 371–401.

⁴⁴ There is much debate over the development of the cult of Mary. Shoemaker argues that there is evidence for the cult from the fourth century: S.J. Shoemaker, 'The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century: A Fresh Look at Some Old and New Sources', in Maunder (ed.), *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, pp. 71–87. Cameron is not convinced by some of the evidence for the early cult and suggests the late fourth century as the starting point: Cameron, 'The Cult of the Virgin', pp. 1–21. Price is more convinced by a later, fifth-century start, following the council of Ephesus: Price, 'Marian Piety and Nestorian Controversy'; Price, 'The *Theotokos* and the Council of Ephesus'.

Chapter 6

Ghosts in the Machine: The Lives and Deaths of Constantinian Imperial Women

Liz James¹

The wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of the tetrarchs and the family of Constantine play a surprisingly elusive role in the written sources of the period, with the notable exception of Helena. They tend to appear only to be married off, bear children or die. This chapter will explore the picture of imperial life in the late third and fourth centuries that this offers, and consider how accurate a picture that might be. Do the sources tell us about these women and their ‘real’ lives, or are they ciphers used to display or comment on imperial behaviour?

The complicated political circumstances of the tetrarchy gave rise to an equally complex picture of imperial women, as wives or partners were put away and alliances forged through matrimony. Understanding the patterns is often handicapped by the lack of personal information about many of these women, even down to the detail of their names. [Figure 6.1](#) puts this information into the form of a family tree.

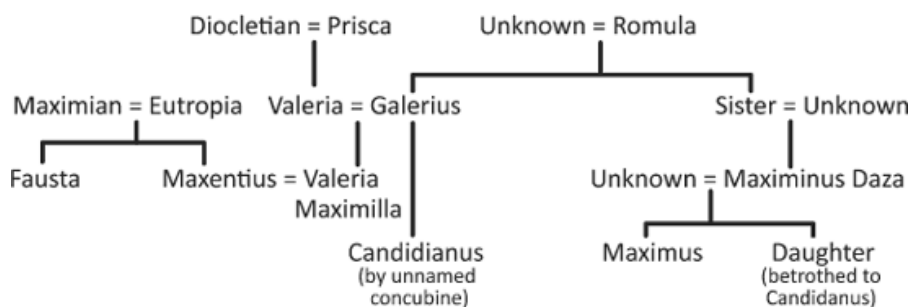


Figure 6.1 Family tree of Diocletian, Galerius and Maximinus Daza

Moving chronologically, we come first to Diocletian's wife, Prisca, whose name is given by Lactantius. Her background, however, is unknown and was almost certainly low-class, reflecting Diocletian's origins.² She and Diocletian had one daughter, called Valeria, who was married to Galerius in 293, when he was made a Caesar. To

Constantius and Theodora had three sons and three daughters. Of the sons, Dalmatius had two sons himself, though his wife's identity is unknown; Julius Constantius was married twice, to Galla, the mother of Gallus Caesar, and to Basilina, the mother of the future emperor Julian.¹⁰ Whether the third son Hannibalianus was married is unknown. Of the three daughters, Constantia was married to Licinius and had a son, the younger Licinius.¹¹ Father and son were put to death by Constantine. Eutropia was married, probably to Nepotianus, consul in the 330s, and had a son, Julius Nepotianus. Mother and son were killed in Rome by Magnentius in 350.¹² Of the third daughter, Anastasia, all that is known is that she was married to Bassianus, who was executed by Constantine in 316.¹³

The children of Constantine add to the level of complication. As shown on the family tree in [Figure 6.3](#), Constantine's eldest son, Crispus, was the child of Minervina, who was probably Constantine's concubine rather than wife and who may have been dead by the time of his marriage to Fausta.¹⁴ Crispus was married to a woman called Helena and they had a child in 322. He may, or may not, have been involved in an adulterous relationship with Fausta; both were executed by Constantine in 326.¹⁵ Constantine and Fausta had three sons and two daughters. If Constantine II and Constans had spouses, no information has survived. Constantius II made up for this by having three wives: the first, an unnamed daughter of Julius Constantius and Galla; the second, Eusebia from outside the family clan, probably the daughter of Flavius Eusebius, from Thessaloniki and consul in 347; the third, Faustina, who bore a daughter, Constantia, later married to the emperor Gratian. Of Constantine's two daughters, Helena was married to her cousin Julian, son of Julius Constantius and Basilina. Constantina married first her cousin Hannibalianus, son of Dalmatius, and then her cousin Gallus, son of Julius Constantius. Both of her husbands were put to death by her brother, Constantius.¹⁶

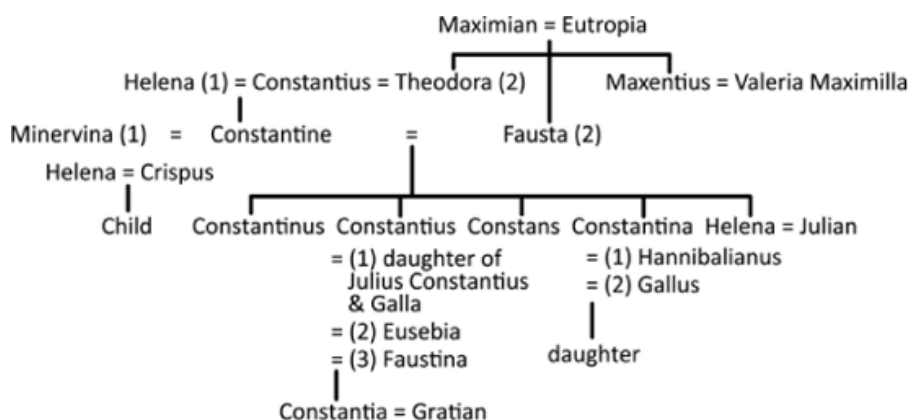


Figure 6.3 Family tree of Constantine

The lack of detail beyond the familial about these women is unsurprising. Dates are at a premium. That we have no idea of the birth dates of any of these women and are compelled to work backwards from dates of marriage or childbirth or even death is not a problem confined to females though; the date of Constantine's birth, for example, is also unknown. Contemporary historians recorded dates that mattered; and those relating to women clearly came low down on that scale, indicating that such dates were of little or no relevance to the purposes of the writers of the time. It was clearly not worth recording what order Constantine's children were born in; what mattered was who the eldest of his sons was. It is also notable that the status of relationships is not always made clear in the sources; this again may have an agenda. Lactantius, for example, described Maximinus Daza as Galerius' 'relative by marriage' (*affinis* or *adfinis*). The term does not convey the information that Maximinus was also Galerius' blood relative; its use consequently undermines Maximinus' dynastic claims to power.¹⁷ It is apparent that names appear only when required. Eusebius, although he described Licinius on several occasions as the brother-in-law of Constantine, never felt it necessary to mention his wife's name; that did not matter.¹⁸ Where wives were not daughters of the imperial family, and especially when they were the wives of despised or hated emperors, this absence is particularly apparent, as with the wives of Maximinus and Severus. But not naming may carry a deeper significance. As Natalie Kampen has pointed out, male historians have a gendered dialogue of suppression and distortion.¹⁹

Mary Beard has highlighted the importance of naming in imperial Rome as an assertion of inclusion, membership in a community and suggested that the removal of a name served to exclude that person from that society.²⁰ By the fourth century, there was a well-established practice of not mentioning the names of overthrown emperors or those deemed usurpers of imperial authority: it helped to deny the physical existence of the person. By not naming these women, they vanish as people from historical records as simply not important enough to be included. As a result, these imperial women appeared in the historical record only really at points in their lives when they made a contribution to immediate dynastic concerns: at their marriage and, often, but not exclusively, at the birth of children. Their own births and deaths were of little concern, unless these also played a part in the author's narrative about a significant man, as, for example, is the case with Valeria, daughter of Diocletian, whose death forms a significant conclusion to Lactantius' *On the Death of the Persecutors*.

In the third century, mentions of imperial women and imperial marriage alliances are few and far between. This may reflect

something of the continuously changing political map and the rapid turnover of emperors, often already married and with no real time in which to cement dynastic alliances. Before Diocletian, there had been 20 emperors in about 40 years, of whom one, Claudius Gothicus, died a natural death (of plague); the rest were killed by enemies or assassins. The longest reign was the 15 years of Gallienus, who succeeded his father Valerian after a relatively stable and long-lasting reign of 7 years (the longest, in fact, after Gallienus himself). These emperors were essentially military dictators seizing power from their predecessors on the back of their own armies. Those born to it might achieve a brief stability, but all too often, 'unworthy' sons of great fathers could be overthrown by the next general out to establish himself as emperor. When the ability to rule depended so much on military might, women's value was limited, since they could play almost no part in military matters.²¹ Further, in such a period of instability, marriage alliances could not be formed overnight. Diocletian became Augustus in 284 but it was not until after a period of about five years in power, a long time in the third century, that he began to make marriage alliances between the different elements of the tetrarchy.

These genealogies highlight how women were used, not unexpectedly, to cement political alliances and to bind men to each other. As a result of this, they were also discarded or reused when political alliances changed or developed unexpectedly. With Diocletian, once things had settled down, the policies of adoption, whereby the men of the tetrarchy were kept in the family, were echoed in the policies of marriage. With the tetrarchic women, a web was created joining different unrelated elements of the tetrarchy: Diocletian's daughter was married to his Caesar, Galerius, and Maximian's daughter, Theodora, was married to his Caesar, Constantius. Thus the two Augusti were both fathers of their adopted sons and in-laws by marriage. These were alliances that cut both ways: not only were the Caesars bound to the Augusti but the dynastic links offered by marriage with these particular women helped to assert and legitimise the Caesar's authority. In addition, influence, whether by men or by women, was always a key point in imperial rule from the time of Augustus onwards. Imperial women could bring an intimate knowledge of imperial affairs to their husbands and, their husbands might anticipate, they could influence their male relatives in aspects of policy.²² How successful they were in this last aspect is debatable. The tetrarchic empresses have less of a track record than the Flavians, where, for example, Constantia helped broker peace between Constantine and Licinius in 324 (though he was nevertheless executed with their son soon afterwards), and Constantina attempted

to keep the peace between Gallus and Constantius (and died in the process). That their husbands might be killed by the wives' own blood family and the women married on again appears to have been an irrelevance in the power-brokering stake and implies that overall, familial loyalty was supposed to outweigh the marital tie.

The practice of dynastic marriage and arranging marriages for political advantage had always been part of the policy of emperors; with the Flavians, this was taken to a higher level. Constantine, as an eldest son by a discarded partner, Helena, who may not even have been a lawful wife, faced the potential threat to his power posed by the existence of his legitimate six half-siblings, all of whom had to be neutralised or used to Constantine's own best advantage. Marriage was a key tool in this case: half-brothers and half-sisters were married to useful contacts, and their children married to Constantine's own children, his nephews to his daughters. Constantine's daughter, Constantina, for example, married successive cousins. Her first husband, Hannibalianus, son of Dalmatius, was killed by her brothers in 337. She died herself whilst on the way to her brother Constantius to plead for the life of her second husband, Gallus, son of Julius Constantius. Constantine's own marriage to Fausta accomplished two goals: it joined him on the Diocletianic model to Maximian and it made him uncle by marriage to his half-brothers and sisters. After Constantine's death, his three sons were faced with the potential threat to their own standing from those cousins and uncles who had survived Constantine's reign. Again, execution or matrimony served as the basic weapons of managing the problem.

In all of these webs of marriage and murder, imperial women had little place as public individuals. Written sources clearly use them as ways of highlighting relationships and struggles between imperial men and as tools for political advantage. Visual sources seem to confirm this primary public role for imperial women in this period as ciphers, significant not for who they were but for what they represented. Images of imperial women from the Tetrarchic and Flavian periods are notoriously hard to identify with specific individuals. Almost invariably, attribution is on the basis of hairstyles, whose features are identified and distinguished in part from comparisons with images on coins, from other iconographic features derived from coins, from comparisons with male imperial imagery supposedly from the same period (at times, equally tendentious) and from belief in probability. Thus, for example, a seated statue of a noblewoman in the Capitoline Museum in Rome is identified as Helena on the basis of its hairstyle, whilst the head of a woman in the same museum is thought to be Valeria Maximilla, wife of Maxentius, on the basis of stylistic similarities with images of that emperor.²³ Similarly, it cannot be

definitively established who the women portrayed on the painted ceiling discovered in the cathedral at Trier were supposed to depict. Considerable energy has been spent on making the case for various Flavian imperial women, including Helena, Fausta and Constantia, but more plausibly, the women portrayed there may simply be personifications.²⁴ Roman portraits of both men and women laid emphasis not on likeness but on the depiction of character and status.²⁵ Images are less about the individuality of the person depicted and more about their standing and what they display of imperial power and authority. These images are both the women themselves and the empress. They offer information about the ways in which it was seen as proper to depict such figures: almost invariably as noblewomen, respectable matrons, emphasising proper female virtues but also potentially used in a familial and thus dynastic context. Hints of more generic attributions are also present: the seated statue of 'Helena' from the Capitoline is a recut image of a figure of Lucilla, sister of Commodus, shown as Venus. Whether the statue retained this quality of pagan divinity in the fourth century is debatable, but if it did, that is suggestive.

Where most visual sources cannot be definitively identified, coins offer the potential to link images of imperial women to historic events and to see if specific women were depicted in specific ways. The presence of imperial women on coins in the late third and fourth centuries was nothing new. Empresses from Livia, wife of Augustus, were depicted regularly on silver and bronze coins and, more infrequently, on gold. Almost all were styled Augusta, though some were *diva*, and the iconography associated with them reflects a range of imperial virtues from Victoria and Concordia to Pietas, Salus (be it of the *Rei Publicae* or the Augusti) and Fecunditas (where appropriate); Roma herself or goddesses, notably Juno, Ceres and Venus might also be employed.²⁶ However, of the imperial women of this period, only a few feature on coins: Valeria, wife of Galerius, Fausta, wife of Constantine I, Helena, his mother, Constantia, his sister, and Theodora, his stepmother and step-grandmother to his sons.

One of the most important points about images on coins is that they were the preserve of the emperor. Coins were an official imperial production and as such, the emperor had ultimate say over the choice of people depicted and the imagery employed. Of the Tetrarchic and Flavian emperors, only Galerius, Constantine and, briefly, Constantine's sons put women on coins, in contrast to the late third century, where coins survive showing at least nine different augustae.²⁷ The question is why: what were the purposes in having these women on coins?

Galerius entitled his wife Galeria Valeria on her coins, a name otherwise unattested in written sources. She is titled Augusta, a title known from other sources, and shown in bust form on the obverse, diademed and draped, with the image of the standing figure of Venus holding an apple and the inscription *Veneri Victrici* on the reverse. What may be apparent here are assertions of imperial status by Galerius. In the third century, it is evident that emperors, in trying to establish their dynastic claims to power, employed their sons on coins where possible, and perhaps used their wives to back up the sense of familial authority. Galerius can be seen as making use of Galeria Valeria to show both his standing with Diocletian and his own dynastic claims. He was the only member of the tetrarchy who had this direct familial connection with the founder of the system, which may explain why no other tetrarchic wife was either given the title Augusta or depicted on coins. *Veneri Victrici* perhaps underlines his pagan religious leanings, but Venus, the ancestress of the Julio-Claudians, and mother of Aeneas, the legendary first founder of Rome, was a significant figure in the Roman pantheon of imperial images and appeared regularly on coins.

Women were not used on Constantine's coins until he had established himself as sole emperor. Bruun has suggested that Constantine used his coinage specifically to make associations with other rulers as they all jockeyed for rank and authority, man against man.²⁸ Here, the use of a woman would have been of no benefit. Once Constantine's power was firmly established, however, this was no longer an issue. Constantine put his wife, mother and sister on his coins. He used Fausta and Helena on coins of all metals, but the image of Constantina only appears on a few bronze coins. Images of Helena and Fausta seem to have been employed almost in tandem from c.318 until 326. The earliest coins are bronze and describe both as *Nobilissima Femina* and depict a draped bust on the obverse with an eight-pointed star in a wreath on the reverse.²⁹ From 324, both are described as Augusta and both are shown on the obverse as diademed and draped busts. On the reverse, coins of Helena tend to show a standing figure lowering a branch with her left hand and raising her robe with her right hand, reminiscent of the figure of *Pax*, but with the inscription *Securitas Reipublicae*. On coins from Rome, for example, the reverse instead bears the inscriptions of *Pietas* or *Felicitas*, invoking other imperial virtues.³⁰ The reverses of coins depicting Fausta show a standing female figure, with veiled head, holding two children at her breast, surely *Fecunditas*, with the inscriptions *Spes Reipublicae* or *Salus Reipublicae*, or, in the case of coins minted in Rome, *Pietas*, as with Helena's. Discussions of the coins of both women have revolved around whether one or the other was shown as the senior Augusta, the

suggestion being that Helena's diadem indicated her superior status.³¹ However, this is to overlook the different roles of imperial wife and imperial mother and how these need to be read from the perspective of commentary on the emperor. They are not images about these women but about these women's roles in the empire of Constantine; coin reverses offer a running commentary on the affairs of state as personified by the emperor.³² One theme that recurs on Constantinian coinage is that of the emperor supported by his family, the same rationale for the employment of women as seen in marriage alliances. Fausta, as imperial wife, was the symbol of the future of the dynasty, the hope and health of the state.³³ Gold coins showing a female figure holding two children and with the inscription *Felix Progenies* underline how important a role this was.³⁴ It is no accident that on gold coins from Trier, Fausta is shown nimbed.³⁵ Helena, in contrast, as imperial mother, had brought security, peace and good fortune to the state in the shape of Constantine. Both were equally valuable symbols of familial virtues.

More intriguing is the apparently small run of bronze coins, apparently only minted in Constantinople, that Constantine issued in honour of his half-sister, Constantia. On the obverse is a bust of Constantia, depicted with braided hair and with the inscription 'Constantia *Nobilissima Femina*'; on the reverse is the legend 'Soror Constantini Aug' enclosing a wreath with 'Pietas Publica' inside it. Their dating is uncertain. Bruun suggested 326–7, though others have placed them in c.330, after Constantia's death.³⁶ The earlier date may, however, suggest that the coins were a comment on Constantia's standing with her half-brother, for her husband Licinius had been executed in 325 and her son in perhaps 326. The coins might underline that Constantia was not regarded as part of the Licinian threat but rather as a member of the Flavian dynasty, and therefore a loyal family member, not a focus for any dissent. The later date is more puzzling; purely commemorative coins of women are not common, least of all in low-denomination bronze.

However, in the context of posthumous imagery, in 337, the sons of Constantine depicted their grandmother, Helena, who was certainly dead, and their step-grandmother and aunt, Theodora, who may conceivably have still been alive, on an issue of coins. Helena's coins show her bust, diademed and draped on the obverse and the image of a female figure holding a branch and a transverse spear with the legend *Pax Publica* on the reverse. Theodora is also shown diademed and draped, with the title *Augusta*, for which there is no other evidence of her holding, and, on the reverse, a female figure holding a babe in arms and with the inscription *Pietas Romana*.³⁷ Why the sons of Constantine chose to use Helena and Theodora on coins is

intriguing. Helena as *Pax* surely underlined the stability brought by Constantine to the empire, a stability his sons claimed to be preserving. Vanderspoel and Mann suggest that the Theodora image was designed to remind people of the images of Fausta on coins from c.324–6, without undoing her *damnatio memoriae*, and to underline the sense of familial dynasty.³⁸ This last must surely be crucial in the case of both the Theodora and the Helena coins and it may be that Theodora was included to emphasise the legitimacy of the sons' descent both from Constantine and from Constantius Chlorus, especially in the aftermath of the murders of Theodora's blood descendants, the sons' cousins and uncles, in the so-called 'massacre of princes' in 337. It is she, after all, whose coins depict a woman and child. Whether Fausta's sons would have maintained her *damnatio* and indeed whether coins of 337 would have reminded users of coins from 10 or more years previously are both debatable.

The imperial women on all of these coins were used to maintain similar themes, themes almost identical to those of their political role in dynastic exchange. The coins reinforce male imperial propaganda of legitimacy, dynasty and the bringing of peace, prosperity, fruitfulness and security to the state. On one level, as with 'portrait' statues, these women are not depicted as individuals, but the public personification of these virtues, all brought by the good emperor. They are most easily distinguished, one from the other, by the inscriptions not the iconography.

Statues and coins reinforce the picture suggested by genealogies of imperial women in the late third and early fourth centuries as ciphers, used by their men to establish themselves more securely or to comment on their own virtues and right to rule. Is it possible to get a sense of these women on a more personal level from the apparently more detailed accounts of their activities presented by some written sources?

Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian and his wife Prisca, is one case where we might feel we know more. Information about Valeria comes primarily from Lactantius' text, *On the Death of the Persecutors*. It is from Lactantius alone that the idea that Valeria and her mother were both Christians is derived, thanks to his comment that Diocletian forced both Valeria and her mother to 'be polluted' by sacrificing.³⁹ Whether they were Christians cannot be definitively established; if they were, then Lactantius was happy to see them come to unhappy ends, as I shall explore below. Lactantius is also the sole source claiming that after the death of Galerius, Valeria fled from Licinius, into whose hands the dying Galerius had placed her, to Maximinus Daza, who confiscated her property and exiled her when she refused to marry him.⁴⁰ From Syria, she called on her father, Diocletian, to

save her, but he was unable to prevail against Maximinus and, in response to this demonstration of his lack of power, died.⁴¹ After Maximinus' defeat, Licinius had Galerius' son, Candidianus, put to death. Valeria, who had approached court in disguise to discover his fate, fled and after 15 months wandering, was discovered in Thessaloniki and executed with her mother. They were beheaded and their bodies thrown into the sea.⁴²

To understand what these events tell us about Valeria and her life, we need first to understand what Lactantius wished to tell his audience, and second to analyse the role that he gave to Valeria in telling that story. A key point of *On the Death of the Persecutors* was to show that God punishes those who persecute his chosen.⁴³ In this context, the portrayal of good and bad emperors in the text was conventional: the antichristian Galerius and Maximinus were both barbarians and opposed to everything that Rome stood for, unlike Constantine who, with Licinius, was the Christian hero of the piece.⁴⁴ There were no shades of grey: everything Constantine and Licinius did was right; everything Galerius and Maximinus did was wrong. Both were portrayed as brutal, savage, oppressive, libidinous, barbarian peasants. Galerius' barbarism was further underlined by the information that his mother was a pagan priestess from beyond the Danube, given to eating the meat from sacrifices and leading her son even further astray.⁴⁵

As the daughter of the Great Persecutor, Diocletian, and the wife of the intemperate and uncivilised pagan, Galerius, Valeria's role in Lactantius' account was unlikely to be that of a heroine. Indeed, her role seems to be to highlight the evils of Maximinus in particular and to underline his barbarism. In chapters 39 and 40, Lactantius told of how, on the death of Galerius, the lustful, libidinous Maximinus could not control himself and attempted to marry Valeria, putting away his wife for her. That bad emperors are always lustful is, of course, a standard rhetorical trope from Suetonius to the *Historiae Augustae*, and so this story served as a means of revealing Maximinus' character all the more clearly. That Valeria responded in Lactantius' account just as a pious, virtuous Roman matron should serve to underline the bestial nature of Maximinus still further. Lactantius then recorded how a high-ranking lady, a grandmother no less, and two other matrons, one the mother of a Vestal virgin, the other married to a senator, were put to death on charges of adultery on the false testimony of a Jew.⁴⁶ Again, these are standard tropes, both apparent in imperial biographies, where lustful and wicked emperors are underlined as evil through their predations on virtuous aristocratic women, and from Christian hagiography, where wicked pagan emperors and the lying Jews falsely combine to accuse virtuous women of sexual crimes in

order to execute them. By this point in the story, Valeria has been exiled to a remote part of Syria from where she calls on her father for help, help he is unable to deliver. This enabled Lactantius to segue into Diocletian's death, an end he claimed was brought on by frustration at his inability to rescue his daughter from Maximinus and to maintain his status with respect to Constantine: how the mighty are fallen.

Finally, Valeria's own death allowed Lactantius to bring the judgement of God down on the family of the Great Persecutors, Galerius and Diocletian. Chapter 50 describes how Valeria came in disguise to the court of Licinius to learn the fate of her adopted son Candidianus, and how Candidianus and Severianus, the son of the emperor Severus, were executed by Licinius. Although these boys had chosen to stay with Maximinus, distrusting Licinius, Valeria had favoured Licinius and 'was willing to bestow on him that which she had denied Maximinus': her rights as Galerius' widow (and her hand in marriage?).⁴⁷ However, this was of no benefit to her for, after 15 months spent wandering from province to province, Valeria and Prisca were captured, executed and their bodies thrown into the sea, the ultimate degradation for criminals in Rome.⁴⁸ So, Lactantius concluded, 'their virtue and their rank were their undoing'.⁴⁹ Although she herself was portrayed as virtuous, Valeria's end was nevertheless appropriate for one so closely linked to the enemy. Lactantius' prime objective at the end of *On the Death of the Persecutors* was to wrap up all loose ends and to show how the judgement of God pursued the unrighteous and their families, even down to Valeria and her mother: the sins of the fathers visited on their children. Whatever their virtues, Valeria and Prisca could not escape the judgement of God on those who persecuted the righteous. Licinius – one of the heroes of the piece – acted simply as God's weapon, exacting His punishment.⁵⁰ That the women's bodies were thrown into the sea was a reflection of this, part of the overall divine punishment, rather than a criticism of Licinius, and these deaths, wiping out the family of the Great Persecutor, seem an appropriate place for *On the Death of the Persecutors* to end.

So Valeria served as a device for Lactantius to criticise Maximinus and to ensure God's justice. What Lactantius' account of the last days of Valeria underlines is that *On the Death of the Persecutors* is a text full of tropes about its protagonists. It is not a history; it is a piece of propaganda designed to praise Constantine and Licinius and to blacken the persecuting emperors, castigating them with every fault typical of bad emperors from Suetonius' Nero onwards. Consequently, we need to consider whether Valeria's is a 'true' story or a plausible story designed to further Lactantius' account of good and bad emperors. While it is credible that Maximinus could see political gain

in marrying Diocletian's daughter and Galerius' widow (who was also his aunt by marriage), we need to question whether the story with the Jew or the account of Valeria disguising herself to find the fate of Candidianus 'really' happened.

Roger Scott has suggested that Late Antique and Byzantine history relied on plausible stories, 'good' stories that made sense to their audiences and might be repeated by author after author, stories that shaped the memory of the past, stories that shaped public opinion by being used for propaganda and, where necessary, were corrected by the next regime, stories that were not necessarily 'what happened' but that could have happened and that explain something of 'what happened'.⁵¹ It is a view of history where the credible can replace the actual. These stories about Valeria might well be seen to fit this category of 'good stories'. Just as we may question the veracity of the *Historiae Augustae* when it claims that Carinus had nine wives and a terrible reputation for lewd behaviour, but understand this as a 'good story' designed to expose Carinus as a 'bad emperor', so too Lactantius' account of Maximinus, the Jew and the grandmother or of Valeria dressing up to penetrate secretly the court of Licinius are designed to expose the evils of Maximinus or the workings of God's Master Plan.⁵² In such writing, women could be used as puppet figures both in the context of their own stories but also as a very easy means to praise or castigate an emperor.⁵³ Criticising a wife or a mother was an excellent weapon for criticising her husband. Either the man could be portrayed as uxorious, led astray by his wife, and thus weak and unmanly, or he could be shown as betrayed by his wife, lacking control over his own household, and so, again, weak and unmanly. Lactantius' portrayal of Galerius is perhaps the more damning because his father is never mentioned and he is said to be led on by his mother.⁵⁴ Similarly, Julian's *Oration* on the empress Eusebia can be read, in its praise of Eusebia, as full of implicit criticism of Constantius.⁵⁵

Furthermore, in the traditions of history-writing, women were good vehicles for acting as ciphers, above all because their behaviour was almost always sexualised by writers, and sexual excess, in men or women, was the bottom line for blame. Something of this may be apparent in the stories that surround the empress Fausta. Two in particular stand out. First, there is the story told by both Lactantius and Eutropius of Fausta's choice, between her father and her husband, over Maximian's plans to kill Constantine: should she betray her father to her husband or her husband to her father?⁵⁶ In Lactantius' more detailed version, Fausta, in speaking to her husband, made the right choice. Constantine is the hero of his narrative, and Lactantius portrays him as an Aeneas to Fausta's Lavinia.⁵⁷ Several scholars have

suggested that this is an invented story, a piece of Constantinian propaganda.⁵⁸ It served to highlight the base nature of Maximian, prepared to use even his daughter against her own husband, invoking the Roman tradition of *patria potestas*. It suggested that Fausta's awareness of Constantine's virtues caused her, a weak and fallible woman who should have been subservient to her father, to break the bounds of proper behaviour in the face of such evil. It underlined God's dealings with the evil; undone by his daughter, death was a fitting punishment for Maximian. If it was indeed invented during Constantine's war with Maxentius, son of Maximian and brother of Fausta, its propaganda value as a story on Constantine's behalf would have been even higher: father and son were both equally treacherous whilst even their sister knew who the rightful emperor was. It was a story in which Constantine could only win; it was not a story about Fausta herself.

The second story is that of Fausta's death, which has become inextricably bound up with the execution by Constantine of his son by Minervina, Crispus. Aurelius Victor, writing in the 360s, did not mention the death of Fausta, and nor do the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* or Orosios, though all three say that Crispus was killed, and Jerome, although he says that Constantine killed both, places the death of Crispus in 326 and that of Fausta in 328, suggesting that an alternative tradition may have existed.⁵⁹ It is the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, written some 70 years after events, which is the first surviving written source to connect the two deaths.⁶⁰ In the same vein, writing in the fifth century, Philostorgios, as excerpted by Photios in the ninth century, blamed Fausta for inciting Constantine to have Crispus executed and then claimed that she was executed in turn for adultery with one of Constantine's *cursores*.⁶¹ The fifth-century poet, Sidonius Apollinaris, employed a neat phrase in exposing Constantine as an emperor in the tradition of emperors such as Nero in his using a hot bath to dispose of Fausta and cold poison to remove Crispus; and John Chrysostom said that an unnamed emperor (taken to be Constantine), suspecting his wife of adultery, exposed her naked on the mountains to wild beasts.⁶² Eutropius asserted that Constantine, in his arrogance, killed a range of his relatives, including his son and his wife. The account most usually cited by modern secondary sources is, however, that of Zosimus writing in the sixth century, repeated by Zonaras in the twelfth. Zosimus claimed that Crispus was suspected of involvement with Fausta and so executed and then, because Helena was distressed by this, to make matters better, Constantine had Fausta put in a hot bath until she died.⁶³ Zosimus, a pagan author, added that it was because Christian priests told Constantine that he could be cleansed of his sins against his family that Constantine converted.⁶⁴

Zonaras' version suggested that Fausta was in love with Crispus but that he resisted her advances. In retaliation, she told Constantine that Crispus had attempted to do violence to her; Constantine had Crispus executed, but when he later discovered the truth, he punished Fausta, a story echoing that of Phaedra and Hippolytos.⁶⁵ As a result, both Crispus and Fausta were removed from all official records, a *damnatio memoriae*.

Yet the written sources are less than uniform in their versions of events. That something happened to Crispus is apparent from the revisions Eusebius made to his *History of the Church*, where a version published probably in 324 has several encomia to Crispus, but a revision after 326 removes these passages. Nor is Crispus mentioned in the *Life of Constantine*, where the three sons of Fausta are extolled.⁶⁶ But this does not mean that Fausta's death was necessarily part of the same scenario. In the accounts of Philostorgios, Sidonius Apollinaris, Chrysostom, Zosimus and Zonaras, the 'good story' motif is again apparent. Just as the story of Fausta betraying her father to save her husband may have been Constantinian propaganda, so too the story of Fausta and Crispus in all the versions where it is retold certainly carries with it overtones of anti-Constantinian propaganda, establishing Constantine as a brutal and vicious emperor.⁶⁷ Constantine after all is the focus of all the authors who deal with the topic; the 'death of Fausta' is, like 'Fausta's choice', a story more about him than it is about Fausta. Zosimus, as a pagan writer, had particular cause to blacken Constantine and he also suggested that Fausta was not the mother of Constantius and Constans. This does not reinforce faith in his accuracy as an historical source for Sozomen, in the fifth century, had already rebutted this idea, but it does underline his credentials as an anti-Constantinian author in attributing sexual misconduct to his wife (who was thus established as out of his control, creating an image of Constantine as a weak man) and bastardy to his sons and heirs.⁶⁸

In this context, it is worth exploring further the evidence for Fausta's disgrace. Hans Pohlsander argued that she must have been executed because otherwise Constantine would have ordered a splendid funeral for her, with orations and monuments; she would have been praised in the *Life of Constantine* by Eusebius; her sons would have honoured her memory; and her name would not have been erased from inscriptions.⁶⁹

To take these sequentially, evidence of splendid funerals, orations and monuments is lacking for most imperial women of this period. We have no real idea, for example, how and where Theodora, Constantia, Constantina, Eusebia, or any of the lesser imperial females were buried, and even Helena's place of burial is debated.⁷⁰ Inasmuch as

Fausta is ascribed a tomb, it is in Constantine's mausoleum in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, something we might interpret as a straw pointing in the opposite direction to the story told by Zosimus.⁷¹ Whatever the circumstances of Fausta's death, it can be argued that she would not have featured in the *Life of Constantine* if we accept that women's presences in texts depend on what the authors want to use them for. Neither the *History of the Church* nor the *Life of Constantine* bothers with women; they were not part of Eusebius' agenda in either text. Not even Helena gets a mention in the *History of the Church*, though she does feature in the *Life of Constantine*, in the context of her work in the Holy Land, which is to say as part of Eusebius' scheme of promoting Constantine the Christian emperor. Interestingly enough, Eutropia, mother-in-law and step-grandmother of Constantine, also rated a mention in the *Life*, in a similar context to that of Helena, a pious journey to the Holy Land. Here, Constantine is said to describe her as his 'most saintly mother-in-law'.⁷² It does beg the question of whether, if Fausta had been executed in terrible disgrace, her mother would have served as an emissary for Constantine. And we cannot be certain that Fausta's sons did not honour her memory. Julian's *Oration* to Constantius praises Constantius' mother as the 'mother of many emperors' and a woman whose 'personal beauty and nobility of character' were impossible to match.⁷³

Even the evidence of erased inscriptions is not totally convincing, for there is only one contentious example. There are gaps in lines two and three of the text of this inscription which commentators from Mommsen on have filled with the words 'Faustae' and 'uxori' and a further gap in line seven where they have supplied 'Crispi'.⁷⁴ These are significant additions and they underline the fact that, as Guthrie pointed out, there is no proof that Fausta is the person to whom this inscription refers; he noted that all of Mommsen's predecessors had preferred to read 'Helenae' and 'matri' in lines two and three.⁷⁵ Proof from coins and images is as tenuous. It is said that images of Fausta disappear from coins at the time of her death and that this indicates her deep disgrace. Bruun, however, claimed that coins depicting both Fausta and Helena stopped being minted at this point in any case and that Helena also briefly disappeared from the coins, to return later.⁷⁶ This reflects that particular issue of coins being discontinued rather than necessarily the disgrace of those whose images graced the coins. No images of Fausta survive from monumental art but the same is true of almost every other imperial woman from this period. Several images survive in examples of minor art, as for example the Ada cameo, and it is interesting that these have not been altered, because the images on cameos could be changed.⁷⁷ All of the above suggests

that the evidence for a *damnatio memoriae* is not conclusive and, indeed, is predicated on a particular reading of the textual sources.

Perhaps there was simply a coincidence in the time of Fausta's and Crispus' deaths, elaborated on in the written sources, in some cases for propaganda purposes. Whether we see the stories around Fausta as 'true' or merely 'good', however, they nevertheless offer insights into 'appropriateness': stories about women had to fit the model of how women were understood to act and behave, governed by the universal concept of 'woman' in place in Late Roman society. This was a time when women were recognised as light-minded and lacking in self-control, and when protection of their virtue required constant supervision.⁷⁸ When women behaved in a suitably chaste and modest manner they were to be treated with respect and consideration, which is why the treatment of Valeria as described by Lactantius was so scandalous and served to underline the barbaric nature of Maximinus Daza. More often than not, however, women were seen as at the mercy of their emotions and sexual urges. Women's sexual misconduct is a topos among Roman authors, who regularly detail imperial women's misdemeanours in sexual terms from Julia, daughter of Augustus through Messalina, as far down as the sixth-century empress Theodora and beyond; it served to explain everything.⁷⁹ Although we may see political motives in the stories linking Crispus and Fausta (a bid to overthrow Constantine), this is not how Zosimus or Zonaras tell it: it is sex and lack of sexual self-control that does for Fausta. But in both cases, sex is the overt driving force of the 'good stories': Maximinus Daza wanted to marry Valeria and so she was forced to flee to protect her virtue; Fausta played Phaedra to Crispus' Hippolytos. Elsewhere, Ammianus Marcellinus suggested that Eusebia, wife of Constantius II, poisoned his sister, Helena, in a bid to prevent her having children.⁸⁰ Eutropia, according to the *Anonymus Valesianus*, admitted that her son Maxentius was actually the illegitimate child of a Syrian.⁸¹ In the text, this comes after the defeat and death of Maxentius and so seems another way of blackening his name. Sex (and its consequence, child-bearing) is the language in which women's actions are almost invariably expressed by the written sources; in a sense, there was no other way of telling these stories. Conspiracy may be joined to this as a secondary consideration, but conspiracy simply reflected women's devious natures, not their role in politics.⁸² Blackening women's names by seeing their action purely in terms of sexual misconduct and lack of self-control served well to obscure any political importance these women may have had.⁸³

What is known and not known of the lives of Valeria and Fausta typifies much of what we understand now about imperial women in this period. The potted biographies of accounts such as those in *PLRE*

make the careers of imperial women appear straightforward: marriage, children, perhaps honours and perhaps death, especially if messy or scandalous, are all the typical elements of their lives that the written sources choose to record. However, the sources, both written and visual, also highlight many of the problems in understanding women's lives in this period. What we know of these women is dictated largely by what the written sources choose to tell us, and authors treat women primarily as vehicles in order to make political or religious points and especially to highlight the worth of the men around them. The relative anonymity of the visual sources serves to underline that in looking for these women as individuals, we achieve relatively little. Rather, the sources need to be interrogated for what they tell us about these women as signs and stories, ciphers commenting on the men around them.

- 1 My thanks to Jill Harries for the topic and to Michelle O'Malley. Simon Lane drew the genealogical trees.
- 2 Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, (ed. and trans.) J.L. Creed (Oxford, 1984), ch. 15.1 (hereafter *DMP*).
- 3 Eutropius, *Breviarium*, (trans.) H.W. Bird (Liverpool, 1993), book 9.22 suggests that a divorce took place; T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA; London, 1981), pp. 8–9 and in *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA; London, 1982), p. 38 suggests that this is an error and also that Valeria Maximilla may have been Galerius and Valeria's daughter.
- 4 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 50.2.
- 5 *Epitome de Caesaribus, Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus*, (ed.) F. Pichlmayr (Leipzig, 1961), book 40.16.
- 6 On the relationship between Daza and Galerius, see C.S. Mackay, 'Lactantius and the Succession to Diocletian', *Classical Philology* 94.2 (1999): pp. 198–209 and T.D. Barnes, 'The Wife of Maximinus', *Classical Philology* 94/4 (1999): pp. 459–60, suggesting that he may also have been a blood-relative of Galerius. For Daza rather than Daia, and that this emperor should be known as Maximinus, see Mackay, 'Lactantius'.
- 7 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch.50–51.
- 8 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch.50.4.
- 9 Barnes, *New Empire*, pp. 33, 37.
- 10 Galla was the sister of Vulcacius Rufinus, consul in 347 and Neratius Cerealis, consul in 358: *PLRE* Galla 1. Basilina was 'from an old and noble family' according to Ammianus Marcellinus, *Histories*, (trans.) J.C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA; London, 1956), book 25.3.23; also *PLRE*, 'Basilina'.
- 11 On Constantia, see H.A. Pohlsander, 'Constantia', *Ancient Society*, 25 (1994): pp. 151–67.
- 12 *PLRE*, 'Julius Nepotianus 5' and 'Virus Nepotianus 7'.
- 13 *Anonymus Valesianus pars prior (Origo Constantini)*, (trans.) J. Stevenson in S.N.C. Lieu and D. Montserrat (eds), *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Christian Views* (London, 1996), ch. 5, pp. 14–15.
- 14 For the debates around Minervina, see Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 42 and H.A. Pohlsander, 'Crispus: Brilliant Career and Tragic End', *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 33.1 (1984): pp. 79–106, at 80.
- 15 Pohlsander, 'Crispus', and D. Woods, 'On the Death of the Empress Fausta', *Greece and Rome* 45.1 (1998): pp. 70–86, set out the written and visual sources.
- 16 For a suggestion that Justina, wife of the usurper Magnentius and then of Valentinian I, was the daughter of Crispus and Helena, see Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 44; that she was the granddaughter of Galla and Julius Constantius, see R.M. Frakes, 'The Dynasty of Constantine down to 363', in Noel Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge 2006), pp. 96–7.
- 17 See McKay, 'Lactantius', pp. 198–209 and Barnes, 'Wife of Maximinus', p. 460.
- 18 Eusebius, *History of the Church*, (trans.) G.A. Williamson (London, 1965), book 10.8.1; *Life of Constantine*, book 1.50.1.
- 19 N.B. Kampen, 'Gender Theory in Roman Art', in D.E. Kleiner and S.B. Matheson (eds), *I Claudia: Women in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, 1996), pp. 14–26; S. Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images 40BC–AD68* (Leiden, 1999), p. 261; E.R. Varner, 'Portraits, Plots and Politics: *Damnatio Memoriae* and the Images of Imperial Women', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 46 (2001): pp. 41–93.
- 20 M. Beard, 'Ancient Literacy and the Function of the Written Word in Roman

Religion' in M. Beard (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World*, JRA supplement, 31 (1991), pp. 46–8.

²¹ For women and the military, see P. Southern and K.R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (London, 1996).

²² Frakes, 'Dynasty of Constantine', pp. 96–8.

²³ Capitoline Museum, Rome: 'Helena' is inv. 496, 'Valeria Maximilla' inv. 106. Both are described in E.A. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 273 and 278. See also N. Hannestad, 'Die Porträtskulptur zur Zeit Konstantins des Grossen', in A. Demandt and J. Engemann (eds), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Mainz, 2007), pp. 96–116 and cat. entries 1.9.45 and 1.9.47.

²⁴ W. Weber, *Constantinische Deckengemälde aus dem römischen Palast unter dem Trierer Dom* (Trier, 1986), summarises the arguments.

²⁵ Wood, *Imperial Women*; Kampen, 'Gender theory', esp. p. 18 and S.B. Matheson, 'The Divine Claudia: Women as Goddesses in Roman Art', pp. 182–94, both in Kleiner and Matheson (eds), *I Claudia*.

²⁶ L. Brubaker and H. Tobler, 'The Gender of Money: Byzantine Empresses on Coins (324–802)', *Gender and History* 12 (2000): pp. 572–94.

²⁷ Paulina, wife of Maximus Thrax; Tranquillina, wife of Gordian III; Otacilla Severa, wife of Philip the Arab; Herennia Etruscilla, wife of Decius; Cornelia Supera, wife of Aemilian; Mariniana, wife of Valerian I; Salonina, wife of Gallienus; and Magnia Urbica, wife of Carinus.

²⁸ P. Bruun, 'Notes on the Transmission of Imperial Images in Late Antiquity', in K. Ascani et al. (eds), *Studia Romana in Honorem Petri Krarup Septuagenarii* (Odense, 1976), pp. 122–31.

²⁹ Dated by P. Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius AD 313–37*, vol. 7 of C.H.V. Sutherland and R.A.G. Carson (eds), *The Roman Imperial Coinage* (London, 1966), pp. 26 and 493–4, to c.318. M. Alföldi, 'Helena Nobilissima Femina. Zur Deutung der Trierer Deckengemälde', *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte*, 10 (1959–60): pp. 79–90, suggested that the Helena in question was the wife of Crispus but Bruun dismisses this. See also J.W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta* (Leiden, 1992), p. 40 and n. 8. On the title *Nobilissima Femina*, see Varner, 'Portraits, Plots and Politics', 56 and n. 109, who suggests that Galeria Valeria Maximilla was the first to hold it, and J.W. Drijvers, 'Flavia Maxima Fausta: Some Remarks', *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 41 (1992): pp. 500–06, at 503.

³⁰ Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 323.

³¹ Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 45 and n. 2; Drijvers, *Helena Augusta*, pp. 42–3, and 'Fausta', pp. 503–504, points out problems.

³² Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 46.

³³ See Brubaker and Tobler, 'Gender of money'.

³⁴ Bruun *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 203. For the gold medallion with *pietae augustae* struck for Fausta at Trier see *ibid.*, pp. 203 and 204.

³⁵ Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 54 n. 3.

³⁶ Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 571; Pohlsander, 'Constantia', pp. 163–4.

³⁷ J.P.C. Kent, 'The Family of Constantine I: A.D. 337–364', vol. 8, in Sutherland and Carson (eds), *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, p. 65.

³⁸ J. Vanderspoel and M.L. Mann, 'The Empress Fausta as Romano-Celtic *Dea Nutrix*', *Numismatic Chronicle*, 162 (2002): pp. 350–55.

³⁹ Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 15.

⁴⁰ Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 35 and chs 39–40.

- 41 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 41.
- 42 Lactantius, *DMP*, chs 49–51. For issues about times and dates see A. Soby Christiansen, *Lactantius the Historian* (Copenhagen, 1980), pp. 21–3.
- 43 On Lactantius' agenda, see Christiansen, *Lactantius*, taking *DMP* as an account of the fight between good and evil. Also on Lactantius and his agenda, though with its focus on *Divine Institutions*, see E. DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a 'Christian Empire': Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca and London, 2000).
- 44 For Galerius and Lactantius, see B. Leadbetter, *Galerius and the Will of Diocletian* (London and New York, 2009).
- 45 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 11.
- 46 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 40.
- 47 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 50.
- 48 Julia Soemias, the mother of Elagabalus, is the only imperial woman whose remains are known to have been drastically and publicly defiled. Valeria, Prisca and the anonymous wife of Maximinus Daza (whose body was thrown into the Orontes, Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 50.6–7) are the only other imperial women whose bodies were mistreated. See M.J. Johnson, *The Roman Imperial Mausoleum in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009).
- 49 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch. 51.
- 50 Christiansen, *Lactantius*, pp. 30–31.
- 51 On 'good stories', see R. Scott, 'Text and Context in Byzantine Historiography' in Liz James (ed.), *Companion to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 251–62.
- 52 *Historiae Augustae*, (trans.) D. Magie (Cambridge, MA; London, 1960), book 16.6–7. Also Leadbetter, *Galerius*, p. 40, and Woods, 'Death of Fausta', pp. 80–83.
- 53 See L. James, 'Is there an Empress in the Text? Julian's *Speech of Thanks to Eusebia*', in N. Baker-Brian and S. Tougher (eds), *Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian the Apostate* (Swansea, 2012), pp. 47–60.
- 54 Leadbetter, *Galerius*, p. 19, suggests that perhaps Galerius' father was a Roman citizen.
- 55 Argued in James, 'Is there an Empress?'
- 56 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch.30; Eutropius, *Breviarium*, book 10.3.
- 57 Lactantius, *DMP*, ch.30, 2–3 and Christiansen, *Lactantius*, pp. 37–9.
- 58 For example, T.D. Barnes, 'Lactantius and Constantine', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 63 (1973): pp. 29–46, at 41–2; Drijvers, 'Fausta'.
- 59 Jerome, *Chronicle*, (trans.) M.D. Donalson (Lampeter, 1996), year 328. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, p. 220, suggests that there was no link between the deaths.
- 60 *Epitome*, ch. 41, 11–12. Both Pohlsander, 'Crispus', and Woods, 'Death of Fausta', lay out the primary textual sources, albeit with different emphases.
- 61 Philostorgios, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, (trans.) E. Walford, *Sozomen and Philostorgius* (London, 1855), book 2, section 4.
- 62 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistle* 5, section 8.2, (trans.) W.B. Anderson (Harvard, MA; London, 1965); John Chrysostom, *In epistolam ad Philippenses commentarius*, *Homily* 15.4–15.5, PG 62, 295.
- 63 Zosimus, *Historia nova*, (trans.) R.T. Ridley (Canberra, 1982), book 2.29, 1–4.
- 64 Julian had already satirised this as a motive for Constantine's conversion: Julian, *The Caesars*, (trans.) W.C. Wright, LCL, vol. 2 (Harvard, MA; London, 1913–23), p. 336A–B.
- 65 Zonaras, *Epitome historiarum*, (ed.) L. Dindorf (6 vols, Leipzig, 1868–75), book 13.2, 38–41.

⁶⁶ And indeed, Constantine II is recorded as the eldest of Constantine's sons: Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, (trans.) Averil M. Cameron and S.G. Hall (Oxford, 1999), book 4.40. For discussion of the fate of Crispus, see P. Guthrie, 'The Execution of Crispus', *Phoenix*, 20.4 (1966): pp. 325–31 and Pohlsander, 'Crispus'.

⁶⁷ As, indeed, Julian had started to do with his *The Caesars*. Also see R.W. Burgess 'The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite Polemic', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 86/87 (1993–94): pp. 47–68, for a discussion of anti-imperial stories becoming part of the histories written by later generations.

⁶⁸ Sozomen, *Church History*, (trans.) E. Walford, *Sozomen and Philostorgius* (London, 1855) book 1.5.1–2.

⁶⁹ Pohlsander, 'Crispus', p. 103.

⁷⁰ See Johnson, *Imperial Mausoleum*, pp. 211–12.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Imperial Mausoleum*, p. 208.

⁷² Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 3.52.1; Pohlsander, 'Constantia', p. 161 and n. 46 on Constantine's high regard for his mother-in-law/step-grandmother.

⁷³ T.D. Barnes and J. Vanderspoel, 'Julian on the Sons of Fausta', *Phoenix*, 38 (1984): pp. 175–6.

⁷⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 10, 678 (= H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin, 1892), no. 710). Dessau claims that it is possible to see that the words 'Faustae' and 'uxori' were erased but remain legible.

⁷⁵ Guthrie, 'Execution of Crispus', pp. 329–30. Short of seeing the actual stone from Sorrento, I feel it is impossible to tell from the published records.

⁷⁶ Bruun, *Constantine and Licinius*, p. 71, n. 10 (going over to p. 72) and pp. 72–3 with n. 6.

⁷⁷ For the Ada cameo, see Pohlsander, 'Crispus', pp. 93–5.

⁷⁸ Neatly defined by J. Evans-Grubbs, 'Constantine and Imperial Legislation on the Family', in J. Harries and I. Wood (eds), *The Theodosian Code* (New York, 1993), pp. 120–42, esp. 136–42 on framing laws to deal with this perception of women. More generally, see G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1993).

⁷⁹ Varner, 'Portraits, Plots and Politics', 58 and n. 132. For Theodora, see E.A. Fisher, 'Theodora and Antonina in the *Historia Arcana*: History and/or Fiction?', *Arethusa* 11 (1973), pp. 253–79.

⁸⁰ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Histories*, book 16, ch. 10.18–19.

⁸¹ *Anonymus Valesianus*, 4, 12. Also see Barnes, *New Empire*, p. 34. *Panegyrici Latini*, In Praise of Later Roman Emperors, (trans.) C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers (Berkeley, 1994), number 12, section 43, to avoid damning Maximian, describes Maxentius as '*suppositus*' son of Maximian. Discussed in Barnes, *Lactantius and Constantine*, pp. 34–5 and n. 53.

⁸² That conspiracy and adultery could be linked and not mutually exclusive, see Wood, *Imperial Women*, pp. 38–9.

⁸³ Varner, 'Portraits, Plots and Politics', 86, on the significant roles played by imperial women in determining the dynamics of Roman political power that become apparent when the quantity of visual evidence that survives is considered.

Chapter 7

Regarding Women on the Throne: Representations of Empress Eirene

Bronwen Neil

Introduction*

Eirene of Athens – wife of Emperor Leo IV and mother of Constantine VI, imperial regent, and later sole empress – is a complex and enigmatic figure, who has only recently attracted scholarly attention.¹ Her period of sole rule (797–802) coincided with the coronation of Charlemagne as ‘Emperor of the Romans’ in St Peter’s Basilica on Christmas Day, 800. Our sources for the coronation, a momentous event in western history, are limited and ambiguous, consisting mostly of Frankish chronicles.² It has become a commonplace that one of the reasons behind Charlemagne’s coronation was the anomaly of Eirene’s rule. This belief is based on the claim found in several Frankish chronicles that for the five years when Eirene held the Byzantine throne as sole ruler it was in fact vacant, thus ‘making way for the claim that the Empire of the Romans could be reconstituted under Charlemagne’.³ Some modern scholars, as we will see, have ascribed the same negative attitude towards female rule to Pope Leo III (795–816).

Other western sources, as we shall see, claimed that Eirene was a usurper, who stole the throne that rightfully belonged to her own son. On the Byzantine side, the reliable and contemporary account of the *Chronicle* of Theophanes Confessor confirms that Eirene had Constantine’s eyes gouged out in 797, to pave the way for her own accession to the throne.⁴ She then sent her son, now disqualified from rule, into exile, where he died perhaps as a direct result of his wounds.⁵ The same Greek source, however, celebrates her achievements in the sphere of orthodox religion. For her defence of icons and iconophiles against her iconoclast husband Leo IV, the Byzantine church subsequently made Eirene a saint.⁶

The disjunction between the eastern and western views of Eirene highlights a problem that has plagued scholarship in both Byzantine and medieval history, namely, a reluctance to consider both halves of the Roman world synchronically. Nelson rightly makes a plea for ‘a

more comprehensive, and comparative, European cultural history that takes in east and west'.⁷ The history of gender presents a unique opportunity to do this kind of analysis, Nelson avers, since it 'has always been able to transcend disciplinary sectionalism and the arbitrary divides of academe'.⁸ Taking up Nelson's challenge to medieval historians and Byzantinists, I examine the different representations of Eirene in the sources (including Frankish chronicles, council *acta*, papal letters, Byzantine historiography, coins and imperial records), looking for evidence of gender stereotyping that has passed down, unquestioned, into contemporary scholarship. Eirene is variously portrayed as an evil, conniving plotter against her own son; a ruthless, ambitious, and domineering woman, easily deceived by unscrupulous advisers; a manipulator of marriage alliances, both her son's and her own; a generous benefactor to the people of Constantinople, and a pious champion of icons. I wish to focus on the question of whether Eirene was regarded as a 'real emperor' in Roman, Frankish and Byzantine sources. As a subsidiary question, I consider how modern scholarship has assessed Eirene's success as sole ruler, and the reasons for her fall from power.

Byzantine Attitudes to Eirene

Byzantine attitudes to a female ruler in the person of Eirene were conditioned by previous exposure. In the fifth century, Pulcheria had held the regency as a 15-year-old on behalf of her younger brother Theodosius.⁹ In the sixth century we have the famous example of Theodora, who rose from humble beginnings to play a pivotal role in Justinian's long rule (527–65).¹⁰ Sophia, wife of Justin II (565–78), and niece of Theodora, also exerted a major influence over her husband and even after his death.¹¹ The empress Martina, the niece of Heraclius who later became his wife in 615 or 616, maintained a very visible presence, travelling with her husband and stepson Heraclius-Constantine during their campaigns against the Persians in the 620s and the Arabs in the 630s. She successfully petitioned for her son Heraclonas to be made co-ruler with Heraclius-Constantine after their father's death. This gave her briefly a position as regent for her 15-year-old son after the untimely death of Heraclius-Constantine, whom she was accused of poisoning. She and her sons, including Heraclonas, were mutilated and sent into exile.¹² Followers of Eirene's precedent on icon veneration were Euphrosyne, granddaughter of Eirene and wife of Michael II (820–29),¹³ and the more famous Theodora II (830–42), who brought an end to the imperial policy of iconoclasm in the ninth century.¹⁴

Eirene's gender physically disqualified her from the priesthood, the emperor being theoretically if not in practice the chief priest of the church of Constantinople.¹⁵ Apparently, however, this was not raised as an objection against Eirene, and she certainly took her religious responsibilities seriously from 780, the year of her assumption of the regency for Constantine, then 10 years old. Evidence for her adoption of the traditional imperial role of 'head of the church' is found in one of the earliest Byzantine sources on Eirene, the *Acts* of the eighth session of the Council of Nicaea II, an ecumenical council convened to discuss the restoration of icon veneration. Eirene had proven an enthusiastic devotee of icons from the time of her husband's death, perhaps viewing this as a way to establish her own spiritual authority.¹⁶ During the final session, Eirene was the first to endorse the *acta* of the ecumenical council with her signature, even before her son Constantine.¹⁷ The imperial pair was enthusiastically acclaimed by all the bishops present as a new Constantine (the Great) and a new Helen:¹⁸

Victoribus imperatoribus multi anni! Pacificis imperatoribus multi anni!
Novo Constantino et novae Helenae aeterna memoria! Deus imperium
ipsorum conservet! Pacatam, Domine, vitam ipsis! Perduret, Domine,
ipsorum imperium! Coelestis rex, tuere terrestres!

[Many years to the victorious emperors! Many years to the peace-bestowing emperors! Eternal commemoration of the new Constantine and the new Helen! God keep safe their reign! Spare their lives, Lord! May their reign endure! Heavenly king, protect your earthly (kings)!]

This was the highest endorsement of piety and orthodoxy for which the mother of a Byzantine emperor could have hoped, and yet Eirene was not content to be defined in relationship to her son.

Theophanes the Confessor is our major Byzantine source on Eirene, and as one who shared her iconophile persuasions, his attitude towards her rule is entirely favourable. While there is no evidence for Eirene's having any fondness for icon veneration before her regency,¹⁹ it is evident from the above-cited text that she embraced the opportunity to bolster her reputation in this way as early as 787. Theophanes is certainly far more negative towards her son Constantine, whom he calls 'God's enemy' (τοῦ θεομάχου Κωνσταντίνου).²⁰ Theophanes' account reveals 'no particular alarm' at Charlemagne's coronation in 800, and there was not the horror in Constantinople suggested by some historians.²¹ Theophanes gave two truncated accounts of Charlemagne's coronation. There is a brief mention in his entry for AD 800/1, where the coronation is paired with Charlemagne's intentions towards Byzantine territories in Sicily, and

towards the Byzantine ruler herself:²²

Τούτω τῷ ἔτει, μηνὶ Δεκεμβρίῳ κε', ἰνδικτιῶνος θ', Κάρουλος, ὁ τῶν Φράγγων ῥήξ, ἐστέφθη ὑπὸ Λέοντος τοῦ πάπα· καὶ βουληθεὶς κατὰ Σικελίας στόλῳ παρατάξασθαι μετεμελήθη, ζευχθῆναι μᾶλλον Εἰρήνῃ βουληθεὶς, πρέσβεις εἰς τοῦτο πέμψας τῷ ἐπιόντι χρόνῳ, ἰνδικτιῶνος ι'.

[In this year, on 25 December in the ninth indiction, Karoulos, king of the Franks, was crowned by Pope Leo. He intended to make a naval expedition against Sicily, but changed his mind and decided instead to marry Eirene. To this end he sent ambassadors the following year, in the tenth indiction.]

An earlier, more detailed account occurs in Theophanes' entry for AD 796/7, in the context of the Roman plot against Pope Leo III, where the coronation is portrayed as Leo's repayment of his debt to Charles for protection against his enemies.²³ Theophanes does not let Eirene's infamous act of blinding her son pass without comment, attributing the 17 days of darkness that fell on the city to Eirene's sinful act.²⁴ Nor does he indicate that he thought the act any more heinous because it was perpetrated against her son. It seems that such niceties counted for little in the Byzantine imperial context, where blinding was a relatively normal method of disqualifying one's rivals in the attempt to gain or maintain power on the throne, in both East and West.²⁵

Theophanes does let his guard down when he claims Eirene was easily deceived by her advisers, 'like the woman she was' (αὐτὴ δε ὡς γυνὴ ἐξαπατηθεῖσα), into thinking that God had given the empire to her, and not to her son Constantine.²⁶ This is a theological trope: just as Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, so all daughters of Eve are easy to seduce into sin. It is true that Eirene found most of her support not in the military, like her husband and son, but among clerics and civil servants – especially eunuchs, such as Stauracius and Aëtius, who posed little dynastic threat, as their physical deficiencies were supposed to make them ineligible to succeed.²⁷ This may have been a deliberate strategy to safeguard her dynastic claims.²⁸ Her confidence in these two advisers was certainly misplaced. Before his untimely death in 800, Stauracius, a former *logothete* appointed army general by Eirene, seems to have harboured ambitions for the *imperium* 'apparently on the theory that a eunuch was no less fit to reign than a woman'.²⁹ Similarly Aëtius, later *strategos* of the important Anatolic and Opsician *themata*, had hopes of raising his brother Leo to the throne.³⁰ Eirene excelled at playing off these two rivals against each other.³¹ Theophanes seems to have regretted her demise and imprisonment by supporters of Nicephorus, former *logothete* of the treasury, writing:³²

καὶ οἱ μὲν εὐλαβεῖα καὶ λόγῳ συζῶντες τὴν θεῖαν κρίσιν ἐθαύμαζον, ὅπως συνεχώρησεν ὑπὲρ τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως μαρτυρικῶς ἀθλήσασαν ὑπὸ συβώτου ἐκβληθῆναι τῶν εὐνουστάτων αὐτῆς προσθεμένων αὐτῷ διὰ φιλαργυρίαν ...

[Men who lived a pious and reasonable life wondered at God's judgement, how he had permitted a woman who had suffered like a martyr on behalf of the true faith to be ousted by a swineherd and that her closest friends should have joined him out of cupidity ...]

Even in the face of disaster, Eirene showed courage more befitting a man in Theophanes' portrayal.³³ Whitrow surely goes too far when he claims that Nicephorus' refusal to recognise Charlemagne's claim to the title of 'Emperor of the Romans' 'was almost certainly not on grounds of principle but a display of the new regime's toughness in contrast with Eirene's "feminine weakness"',³⁴ namely her payment of massive tribute to the Arabs from 798. The humiliating treaty imposed on Nicephorus by the 'Abbasid caliph Harun Al-Rashid is surely testimony to the superiority of her irenic policy.'³⁵

Papal Responses to Eirene

Eirene's rule as regent (780–90, 792–7) and then sole ruler spanned the pontificates of two figures renowned for increasing the power invested in the bishop of Rome. Hadrian I (772–95) demonstrated a deep respect for Eirene in the documents exchanged in the lead-up to the Council of Nicaea II, especially his synodical letter (*Synodica*) of 785.³⁶ On the doctrinal issue of the veneration of icons, at least, he sided with Eirene and Constantine VI. His dissatisfaction lay with their usurpation of what he regarded as papal patrimonies in East Illyricum, and Sicily and Calabria in southern Italy. Hadrian also objected to Patriarch Tarasius' 'ridiculous' adoption of the title of 'ecumenical ruler' which, in his view, belonged to the bishop of Rome alone.³⁷ Hadrian I's entry in *Liber Pontificalis* contains the only mention of Eirene in the whole *gesta* of the bishops of Rome.³⁸ Interestingly, in referring to the Council of Nicaea II held in 787, the anonymous author there identifies Constantine and Eirene as 'emperors' on two occasions:³⁹

Qui praefati *imperatores* eandem venerantes atque amplectentes apostolicam epistolam, concilium in Nicea congregari fecerunt, iuxta trecentorum quinquaginta episcoporum, qui secundum doctrinam praelatae epistolae nimirum crediderunt ac promulgantes censuerunt, et synodum universalem definierunt mire assertionis pro venerandis imaginibus erectione. Quam synodum iamdicti missi in greco sermone secum deferentes una *cum*

imperialibus sacris manibus proprii subscriptis, praedictus egregius antistes in latino eam translatari iussit, et in sacra bibliotheca pariter recondi, dignam sibi orthodoxe fidei memoriam aeternam faciens.

[These *emperors* revered and welcomed this apostolic letter [i.e. Hadrian's *Synodica*], and had a council of some 350 bishops gathered at Nicaea. Their belief was in clear accord with the teaching of this apostolic letter, as was the resolution they promulgated. They defined a universal synodic[al] decree, a wonderful affirmation on the setting up of the venerable images. The same envoys brought with them this synod's decrees in Greek along with the *emperors'* mandates with their actual signatures. The noteworthy bishop bade them be translated into Latin and deposited in the sacred library, and so created a worthy everlasting memorial to his own orthodox faith.]

Hadrian's memorial to his orthodoxy was not quite everlasting: the original Latin translation of the *Acts* of Nicaea II unfortunately did not survive and had to be retranslated in the ninth century.⁴⁰

When Constantine ousted his mother from the regency to rule alone from October 790 until January 792, Hadrian was well aware of Eirene's change in status. In his famous *Hadrianum*, a letter to Charlemagne (c.791), Hadrian refers to Constantine as the sole emperor (*imperator*), while using plural verbs and pronouns to indicate that both rulers were meant.⁴¹ Earlier in the *Hadrianum*, however, Hadrian referred to his letter of 785 to 'the emperors Eirene and Constantine' (Herene et Constantino imperatoribus).⁴² In all his correspondence with the imperial pair, as well as in the *Liber Pontificalis* entry on Hadrian I, the emphasis is on their consensus of opinion regarding icon veneration. Charlemagne responded to the *Hadrianum* in 794 with the *Libri Carolini*, which condemned the synod of 787, and contains an admonishment against women teaching at a synod, as Eirene was said to have done at Nicaea II.⁴³

Hadrian's successor, Leo III, held the papal throne until 816. Upon his consecration on 27 December 795, Leo sent Charlemagne the keys to the shrine of St Peter and the banner of the papal city, thus recognising him as Rome's protector.⁴⁴ It is obvious that Leo had already decided where his best hope lay, well before Eirene's advent as sole ruler in 797. Leo's role in the coronation has long been recognised as ambiguous. Some sources claim that he orchestrated the event against Charlemagne's will. Like Theophanes, the author of the *Liber Pontificalis* maintained that Charlemagne had earned the pope's allegiance in 799, after Leo III was accused of adultery by partisans of the previous pope and nearly blinded. Charlemagne offered him refuge in his court in Paderborn. As a result, the emperor of the Franks agreed to travel to Rome in November 800, to be crowned 'Emperor of the Romans' in St Peter's on Christmas Day. In spite of scholarly assertions to the contrary,⁴⁵ Leo III never expressed the

opinion, prior to 800 or afterwards, that the imperial throne was empty because a woman was the incumbent, or that it was empty because she was a usurper. It seems unlikely that Leo would have ventured such an opinion, given that Eirene shared his enthusiasm for the veneration of icons. The *Liber Pontificalis* entry on Leo III leaves Eirene out entirely, even in its account of the coronation of Charlemagne in 800.

Western attitudes to Eirene were also coloured by attempts to arrange a marriage contract between the empress and the new ‘Emperor of the Romans’. Here again, our sources are ambiguous. Eirene possibly approached Charlemagne with a proposal of marriage in 798, according to a single western source dealing with the chronological calculation of the end times, known as the *Kölner Notiz*.⁴⁶

One school of thought sees here an offer from Eirene to hand over her power, another attempt by her enemies to destabilise her rule.⁴⁷ Theophanes, on the other hand, attributes the initiative to Charles, who sent an embassy to present his proposal to Eirene later in 801, an embassy that included legates of Pope Leo III.⁴⁸ At this point Charles had been widowed for about a year, since the summer of 800. The purpose of such a union was to unite the two halves of the old Roman empire. The presence of papal legates on Charlemagne’s embassy to arrange a marriage contract indicates papal recognition of her rule. The marriage plans were scotched by a palace coup by supporters of the *logothete* Nicephorus (802–11), who persuaded Eirene to retire quietly, then banished her to the monastery she had founded on the island of Prinkipo. The coup took place while the legates of Charlemagne were present in Constantinople, and was calculated to send a powerful message to the self-styled ‘Emperor of the Romans’.

Modern scholars have been uniformly dubious about the authenticity of the intended marriage between Charlemagne and Eirene. Even Grierson, who pleads for recognition of the inadequacies of our sources when attempting ‘any satisfactory exploration of Byzantine attitudes’⁴⁹ to the Carolingian empire, doubted the seriousness of the marriage proposal, since her history of violence against her own offspring was ‘scarcely calculated to make her acceptable as a bride’.⁵⁰ Instead, Grierson contended that the proposal was just a cover for discussions about Charlemagne’s adoption of the title ‘Emperor of the Romans’, a title which posed a threat to the Greeks since they understood *romanorum* (Gr. ῥωμάνων) to refer to themselves.⁵¹

Frankish Attitudes to Eirene

Contemporary, or near-contemporary, Frankish sources on Eirene's *imperium* include *Annales regni francorum*, *Annales Laurashamenses*, *Chronicon Moissiacense*, *Annales veteres francorum*, and the anonymous *Vita sancti Willehadi*. All of these texts comment on her rule in the context of Charles's imperial coronation, but their representations of the Byzantine ruler at the time vary dramatically. Their evidence is considered below.

1. *Annales regni francorum* (ARF)

The *Annals of the Frankish Kings*, first compiled in the 780s and updated after 801,⁵² gave an account of Charlemagne's coronation which simply omitted any mention of Eirene, as if her rule were of no relevance to the transfer of *imperium* over the West:⁵³

et a cuncto Romanorum populo adclamatum est: "Carolo augusto, a Deo coronato magno et pacifico imperatori Romanorum, vita et victoria!" Et post laudes ab apostolico more antiquorum principum adoratus est atque ablato patricii nomine imperator et augustus est appellatus.

[And it was proclaimed by all the Roman people: "To Charles Augustus, crowned by God as the great and peace-loving emperor of the Romans, [be] life and victory!" And after praises from the pope he was revered in the manner of ancient emperors, and he was named emperor and Augustus, after the title of patrician had been removed.]

2. *Annales Laurashamenses* (AL)

The author of the *Annals of Lorsch*,⁵⁴ written by three chroniclers between 741 and 829, identified the lack of an emperor among the Greeks, and Eirene's 'feminine rule' (*femineum imperium*) as the two reasons that a Roman council convened by Leo III decided that Charles ought to hold the title of emperor:⁵⁵

Et quia iam tunc cessabat a parte Graecorum nomen imperatoris, et *femineum imperium apud se* [h]abebant, tunc visum est et a ipso apostolico Leoni et universis sanctis patribus qui in ipso consilio aderant, seu reliquo christiano populo, ut ipsum Carolum regem Franchorum imperatorem nominare debuisset, qui ipsam Romam tenebat ...

[And because the title of emperor had already by then ceased among the Greeks, and *they had a woman ruler there*, it seemed at that time right both to the apostolic Leo himself and to all the holy fathers who were present at that council, as well as to the rest of the Christian people, that he ought to proclaim as emperor Charles, king of the Franks, who held Rome itself ...]

The *Annals of Lorsch* have been famed for being unique in offering ‘the opinion that Charlemagne’s elevation to the imperial title was due to the name of emperor being lacking among the Greeks at the time because of female rule [*femineum imperium*]’.⁵⁶ However, our next chronicle offers more evidence of the same view.

3. *Chronicon Moissiacense (CM)*

The *Chronicle of Moissac*, named after the Benedictine monastery where it was found, also attributes this view to messengers (*nuncii*) sent to Charles in Rome, one assumes in 800.⁵⁷ The text of *CM* was largely dependent on our previous two chronicles, *AL* and *ARF*.⁵⁸ *CM* was also compiled at the beginning of the ninth century, although its sole surviving manuscript was copied shortly before 1071, possibly at Narbonne.⁵⁹ In repeating the same version of events, namely that certain Greeks brought the message of ‘feminine rule’ in Byzantium to Charles in Rome, its author does not specify whose interests these messengers represented – they may well have been legates of Eirene’s opponents in Byzantium.

4. *Annales veteres francorum (AVF)*

It is the *Ancient Annals of the Franks* that seem to me to present the most authentic interpretation of the reason for Frankish resistance to Eirene’s rule, with a variant reading at the crucial point of the text. Whereas *AL* and *CM* read ‘they (*sc.* the Greeks) had a female imperial rule among them’,⁶⁰ *AVF* reads: ‘the title of empire held an end [*finem*] among them’.⁶¹ Thus, the messengers claimed that the title of emperor had ceased to exist among the Greeks because of Eirene’s usurpation of the title, not due to the fact that her gender made void her claim to rule.⁶² The text immediately following supports my contention that ‘end’ (*finem*) is the true reading. In an interpolation, the author describes how Eirene had her son blinded, and, like Athaliah in the book of Kings,⁶³ snatched the name of emperor for herself, before continuing on to its description of how the Roman council, convened by Pope Leo III, decided that Charlemagne should become emperor:⁶⁴

... Herena nomine, quae filium suum imperatorem fraude captum, oculos eruit, et sibi nomen imperii usurpavit, ut Atalia in libro Regum legitur fecisse, audito Leone papa et omnis conventus episcoporum et sacerdotum seu abbatum, et senatus Francorum, et omnes maiores natu Romanorum, cum reliquo christiano populo consilium habuerunt, ut ipsum Carolum, regem Francorum imperatorem nominare deberent, qui Romam matrem imperii tenebat, ubi semper Caesares et imperatores sedere soliti fuerant.

[... by the name of Eirene, who captured her son, the emperor, by treachery, and put out his eyes, and usurped the name of emperor for herself, as did Athaliah in the book of kings. When Pope Leo had been heard, the whole gathering of bishops and priests and abbots, and the Frankish senate, and all those Romans of high birth, held a council with the rest of the Christian population, to the effect that Charles himself, king of the Franks, should take the name of emperor, who held Rome, the mother of the empire, where Caesars and emperors had always been accustomed to reside.]

According to this text, Eirene's rule is invalid because she usurped the throne from Constantine, not because of her gender, as in *AL* and *CM*.

5. *Life of St Willehad*

The latter reading was taken up not just in Frankish chronicles but also in hagiography. The anonymous author of the *Life of St Willehad* – a somewhat later text which has been dated to between 838 and 847⁶⁵ – also singles out Eirene in connection with the transfer of power over the western Roman empire to Charlemagne:⁶⁶

Siquidem imperialis potestas, quae post Constantinum piissimum augustum apud Graecos in Constantinopolitana hactenus regnaverat sede, cum, deficientibus iam inibi viris regalis prosapiae, feminea magis ditione res administraretur publica, temporibus ipsius per electionem Romani populi in maximo episcoporum aliorumque Dei servorum concilio, ad Francorum translatum est dominium.

[Then, with men of the royal family lacking there [in Byzantium] and with the state being administered by a woman's authority, in the time of Charles the empire was translated to the rule of the Franks through the election of the Roman people and especially by a council of bishops and other servants of God.]

The author of the *Vita* does not, however, ascribe to Pope Leo III or any other westerner the view that the Byzantine throne was empty because a woman was the incumbent.⁶⁷

As attractive as this claim has appeared to modern scholars, the real motive for the antagonism of Frankish sources towards Eirene is probably to be found, not in Eirene's gender, but in her iconophile policy. The Franks remained resistant to icon veneration even after the Council of Nicaea II reinstated the practice. Charlemagne expressed his misgivings to Hadrian I, who sent back the *Hadrianum*, a lengthy response organised under rubrics of quotations from the Frankish statement of protest. Whittow has suggested that the main cause for Byzantine concern at the time of Charles' coronation (reported some years later by Charlemagne's biographer, Einhard), was their assumption that anyone who was so crowned must be intending to

make claims on their empire.⁶⁸ In Einhard's account, Eirene exhibited no such resentment. Einhard reports that Charlemagne made friendly overtures to successive 'Roman emperors' – Nicephorus, Michael I and Leo V – in frequent letters and embassies, in which he addressed them as 'brothers'.⁶⁹ Notker the Stammerer likewise wiped Eirene from his record of Charlemagne's life and rule,⁷⁰ while Alcuin, in a letter of June 799, refers to the news of Constantine's deposition without mentioning Eirene except indirectly.⁷¹

Eirene's Self-Regard: *Basileus* and *Basilissa*

Finally, we must ask what we can know of how Eirene regarded herself during the five-year period of her sole rule. A significant clue is her adoption of the title of *basileus* for herself in written documents,⁷² while issuing coins with her image on both sides, under the title of *basilissa*. The title of *basilissa* was frequently bestowed upon imperial consorts in a special coronation ceremony, as well as on sisters and even nieces of emperors.⁷³ Eirene was the first to use the term *basilissa* on coins minted between 797 and 802.⁷⁴ As Brubaker and Tobler observe, in spite of the excitement that the double image on the obverse and reverse on coins has raised among modern scholars, it went unremarked at the time, and was later copied by emperors Michael I, Leo V and Michael II.⁷⁵ The interpretation by some modern scholars of Eirene's appropriation of the double image as evidence of her 'over-ambitious and power-hungry nature' informs us more about the construction of gender in modern scholarship than it does about Eirene.⁷⁶ By contrast, Eirene's use of the term *basileus* in official documents has been interpreted as a conservative cover for the innovation of her sole rule, even though it was constitutionally sound.⁷⁷

It is instructive to compare Eirene's propaganda programme with that of Pulcheria, who was depicted on coins minted soon after her adoption of the regency for her younger brother Theodosius in 414. With Theodosius on the reverse, Pulcheria appeared on the obverse. She was shown being crowned by the right hand of God, 'a development by no means without precedent, although all previous *Augustae* had received the status as the result of providing children to their husbands (the emperors)'.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Eirene held on to imperial power in Byzantium under one title or

another for 22 years, from 780 to 802. She died in exile on the island of Lesbos within a year of being banished from Constantinople, thereby managing to avoid a violent death, frustrating powerful enemies who had good reason to wish to curtail her career. There seems to have been little resistance to the fact of her gender in Byzantium or in Rome, allowing for the absence of iconoclast sources which would doubtless have offered a more critical portrayal. After all, Byzantine *basilissai* were nothing new by the end of the eighth century, even though Eirene was the first woman to rule alone. Frankish objections to Eirene were founded on religious antipathy, in the context of the unfolding iconoclast controversy. That this religious factor led to distorted representations of the empress by the Franks has not received sufficient attention from modern scholars, with the notable exception of Judith Herrin who leaves open the question of how much Eirene's 'heretical' stance on icons contributed to the western condemnation of her rule.⁷⁹ Modern scholarship has unfortunately perpetuated the myth that the popes and/or the Franks objected to Eirene mainly on the grounds of her gender.

What should we make of contemporary Frankish and Byzantine analyses of the reasons for Eirene's fall from power in 802? Palace coups were an unremarkable event in Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries, a period when very few Greek emperors, of any gender, died in their beds. Runciman conceded that Eirene 'fell eventually owing to her ill-health [referring to a hemorrhage she suffered in 799] rather than her sex', while later on the same page opining that she 'fell when she could no longer control her ministers'.⁸⁰ It is unlikely that Eirene was any less able to control her ministers at the end of her reign than anybody else who was about to be deposed. Certainly her authority was impaired by being physically disqualified from the theoretical priesthood that the emperor was meant to hold, and also from leadership of an army due to her sex, but that does not seem to have held her back, nor did his gender help her son Constantine who fared badly in most of his military engagements against the Bulgars and the Arabs.⁸¹ Managing the various divisions of the army, including the mobile army units stationed in or near Constantinople (*tagmata*) and their generals, was part of the job of any Byzantine ruler, since rivals frequently were raised by the military. Eirene managed to reduce taxes on church properties, decreased the trade excises (*komerkia*) on the sea trade,⁸² and disbursed largesse to the people of the city and to the *tagmata*, while also putting aside a great deal of treasure. Her financial management was, as one historian put it, 'not unsuccessful'.⁸³ During her reign the war against icons undertaken by previous emperors, including Eirene's husband Leo IV, and the resultant civil unrest in Constantinople, was put to bed, for a

time at least.

These were not small achievements, and it would be a mistake to project our own scepticism about what a woman can achieve in the political arena back onto the early ninth century. Likewise, we should be wary of uncritically accepting allegations of chauvinism towards Eirene on the part of the bishop of Rome, however tempting it may be in view of the modern papacy's conservatism on the issue of women's roles. The Frankish literary evidence is negatively coloured by iconoclastic fervour. Contemporary Roman evidence was equally biased in the opposite direction, in line with its own iconophile perspective. Admittedly, Byzantine commentators would have been unlikely to object openly to someone with Eirene's reputation for ruthlessness, whatever their gender. But even after her death, negative assessments of her rule on the basis of her femininity do not survive in Byzantine sources, except in Theophanes' mild rebuke of her propensity to being deceived, as discussed earlier. All assessments of the Byzantine evidence labour under the *caveat* that surviving iconoclastic sources are extremely rare, due to the ultimate success of the iconophile movement led by Empress Theodora in the mid ninth century.

Most surprising in this brief study of representations of Eirene is the prevalence of modern imputations to her of 'feminine weakness'. Some modern historians fall back on psychological gender stereotypes that would have been wholly acceptable to the Byzantines, in according her a naked lust for power.⁸⁴ This was a woman who had her five brothers-in-law and her only son blinded to neutralise potential threats to her rule. It is possible that behind some of the grudging admissions of her achievements there lurks moral outrage at such female ambition, an ambition which trumped whatever maternal instincts she may have felt towards the son who blocked her way to the throne. Whatever Eirene's faults or deficiencies as a ruler, weakness was surely not one of them.

* I am grateful to Pauline Allen, Director of the Centre for Early Christian Studies, and Stephen Lake, former research associate at Australian Catholic University, for their comments on the draft, and to Roger Scott for his insightful criticisms and suggestions for improvement. All errors that remain are naturally my own responsibility.

¹ The sole monograph on Eirene remains R.-J. Lilie, *Byzanz unter Eirene und Konstantin VI. (780–802) mit einem Kapitel über Leon IV. (775–80) von Ilse Rochow*, Berliner Byzantinistische Studien 2 (Frankfurt am Main, 1996) – see the literature cited therein. Briefer treatments include W. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford, 1988), pp. 60–126; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1024* (London, 1999), pp. 73–94; J. Herrin, *Women in Purple: Rulers of Medieval Byzantium* (London, 2001), pp. 51–129; L. James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium*, Women, Power and Politics (Leicester, 2001), *passim*; in connection with the restoration of icons in 787, A. Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681–1071*, The Church in History, 3 (Crestwood, NY, 2007), pp. 60–65. The new volume by L. Brubaker and J.F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (c. 680–850): A History* (Cambridge, 2011), esp. pp. 775–813 on ‘The triumph of tradition? The iconophile intermission’, is another valuable resource. It is interesting to note that the recent collection of essays in *A Companion to Byzantium*, (ed.) Liz James (Chichester; Maldon, MA, 2010) contains a mere single mention of Eirene, at pp. 332–3.

² R. Folz, *The Coronation of Charlemagne, 25 December 800*, (trans.) J.E. Anderson (London, 1974) contains a translation of many of the main source passages in an appendix. J. Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (London, 1989), pp. 454–9, presents an excellent summary of recent scholarship.

³ Louth, *Greek East*, p. 64.

⁴ Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6289, (ed.) C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), vol. 1, p. 472. The purpose of the blinding was to kill Constantine, according to Theophanes.

⁵ Paul Speck’s theory that Constantine died within months of the incident has been accepted by some scholars including W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997), p. 423; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, p. 422, while others maintain that he survived in exile for some years. That he was dead by 805 has been established beyond doubt by E.W. Brooks, ‘On the Date of the Death of Constantine the Son of Irene’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 9 (1900): pp. 654–7. See the discussion of C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 282–813* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 649–50, n. 10.

⁶ Eirene was commemorated in the *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolae*, along with every other emperor who convened an ecumenical council: G. Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, (trans.) J. Birrell (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 153–4, concludes that these emperors and empresses, apart from Constantine, were not ‘real saints’. A survey of iconophile sources is presented by L. Brubaker, J.F. Haldon and R. Ousterhout, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850). The Sources: An Annotated Survey*, Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs (Farnham, 2001).

⁷ J.L. Nelson, ‘Gender, Memory and Social Power’, in P. Stafford and A. Mulder-Bakker (eds), *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 192–204, at 201.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See G. Greatrex, ‘Pulcheria’, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/pulcheria.htm>, and literature cited therein (2004) (accessed 12.2.12).

¹⁰ See Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 11–39.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 40–58; Garland, ‘Sophia’, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/sophia.htm>, and literature cited therein (1999) (accessed 12.2.12).

¹² e.g. by Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6132, p. 341. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 66 and 71, asserts that the accusation was without foundation, as there is other evidence that Heraclius-Constantine was suffering from a terminal illness. Martina’s demise after Heraclius’ death in 641 was the result of a successful conspiracy against her that was credited to the senate in Constantinople: Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6133, p. 341; cf. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 71–2, who states that the controlling role of the senate in these events may have been a ‘polite fiction’.

¹³ Euphrosyne was apparently an iconophile like her grandmother: see Herrin, *Women in Purple*, pp. 130–84, although Herrin admits that, ‘nothing whatsoever is recorded about Euphrosyne’s activities as empress during the reign of her husband Michael II’ (p. 158).

¹⁴ Herrin, *Women in Purple*, pp. 185–239.

¹⁵ The theory is questioned by Maximus the Confessor in the record of his trial of 655, *Relatio Motionis*, 4, (ed. and trans.) P. Allen and B. Neil, *Maximus the Confessor and his Companions: Documents from Exile*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford, 2002), pp. 56–7, where he demonstrates from the liturgy that the emperor belonged to the laity not the priesthood.

¹⁶ The twelfth-century source, Kedrenos, attributed to her a secret enthusiasm for icons during her marriage to Leo IV, which resulted in him banishing her from the marriage bed, but there is no evidence for this. Cf. Herrin, *Women in Purple*, pp. 71–2, who cites Treadgold’s ‘ingenious’ theory that Kedrenos may have sourced this story from a near-contemporary witness of the ninth century: see W. Treadgold, ‘An Indirectly Preserved Source for the Reign of Leo IV’, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 34 (1984): pp. 69–76.

¹⁷ ‘And, accepting it favourably, the radiant, most pious empress put her name to it, and gave it at once to her reigning son, so that he too could put his name to it’ (Et accipiens fauste praeifulgens religiosissima imperatrix subscripsit, dabatque simul regnanti filio, ut et ipse subscriberet) (*PL* 129, 478D–79A). All translations are my own unless otherwise cited. This section of the *acta* was not transmitted to the West in the ninth-century Latin translation by Anastasius Bibliothecarius. The Latin version of Session 8 in *PL* 129, 477–9, was taken over from A. Conti’s edition.

¹⁸ *PL* 129, 479A.

¹⁹ L. Brubaker, ‘Icons and Iconomachy’, in James (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantium*, pp. 323–37, at 332–3.

²⁰ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6290, p. 473; (trans.) Mango and Scott, p. 650.

²¹ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium, 600–1025* (London, 1996), p. 304.

²² Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6293, p. 475; (trans.) Mango and Scott, p. 653 (modified).

²³ Ibid., AM 6289, pp. 470–71.

²⁴ Ibid., AM 6289, p. 472.

²⁵ Herrin, *Women in Purple*, 99. See also J. Herrin, ‘Blinding in Byzantium’, in C. Scholz and G. Makris (eds), *Polypheuros Nous. Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, Byzantinisches Archiv, 19 (Munich, 2000), pp. 56–68.

²⁶ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6282, p. 464; (trans.) Mango and Scott, p. 638. This occurred in 789/90, when those same advisers, seeking power for

themselves, told Eirene that she was ordained by God to rule alone.

²⁷ A point also made in Nelson's review of Garland's *Byzantine Empresses*, 'Gender, Memory and Social Power', in P. Stafford and A. Mulder-Bakker (eds), *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 192–204, at 200.

²⁸ While Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 88 and 92, interpreted Eirene's reliance on eunuchs 'for whatever reason' (p. 92) as political advisers and military leaders as a sign of her weakness as a ruler, Nelson disagreed in 'Gender, Memory and Social Power', p. 200: 'Irene's reliance on eunuchs was part of, rather than in contradiction with, what Garland recognizes as her political skill'. That is to say, eunuchs could make no claims to the throne themselves, being disqualified by their physical imperfection. The political role of eunuchs in the late-antique and middle Byzantine period is treated by S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies (London; New York, 2008), chapters 4 and 5. Recently K.M. Ringrose, *Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), p. 34, posited a shift around the eighth century from a negative characterisation of eunuchs in late-antique sources to a more positive one, as eunuchs became more indispensable in middle Byzantine courts. I simply note that Eirene's eunuchs – uniformly negatively characterised by Theophanes – were active in the early ninth century.

²⁹ Treadgold, *A History*, p. 423. Eunuchs could lead an army into battle while women could not, although as Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, p. 73, pointed out, Eirene accompanied Constantine and the army to Thrace and the Bulgar frontier twice in 784 and 786.

³⁰ Treadgold, *A History*, pp. 423–4.

³¹ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, p. 111.

³² Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6295, pp. 476–7; (trans.) Mango and Scott, p. 655.

³³ Ibid., AM 6295, pp. 477–8; (trans.) Mango and Scott, p. 656.

³⁴ Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p. 305. I have been able to locate no Byzantine source attributing the phrase 'feminine weakness' to Eirene, although it was a common *topos* of Greek literature, e.g. Plato, *Laws*, book 6, (trans.) B. Jowett (New York, 1892; repr. Mineola, NY, 2006), p. 781A. See J. Beaucamp, 'Le vocabulaire de la faiblesse féminine dans les textes juridiques romains du IIIe au VIe siècle', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 54, (1976): pp. 485–508.

³⁵ 30,000 nomismata was paid in 806: Treadgold, *A History*, p. 426.

³⁶ The imperial letter (*Divalis sacra*) sent to Hadrian I in c.785 survives only in the Latin translation of the *Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council* that Anastasius Bibliothecarius made in the ninth century (*PL* 129, cols 199–202). On Hadrian I's *Synodica* to Constantine and Eirene, see B. Neil, 'The Western Reaction to the Council of Nicaea II', *Journal of Theological Studies*, new series, 51.2 (2000): pp. 533–52, at 537–40.

³⁷ *Synodica*, 27 October 785 (ed.) G.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (repr. Graz, 1960–61), vol. 12, cols 1074A–75B. See discussion in Neil, 'Western Reaction', 538.

³⁸ There is, however, one reference to 'the palace of Eirene' in the later ninth-century *Life of Hadrian II*, ch. 37, which could either be a building close to the church of *Hagia Eirene*, or an alternative name for the palace of Eleutherios, built by Eirene, as noted by R. Davis (trans.), *The Lives of the Ninth-Century Popes* (Liber Pontificalis), TTH, 20 (Liverpool, 1995), p. 277, n. 95.

³⁹ L. Duchesne and C. Vogel (eds), *Le Liber Pontificalis*, vol. 1 (2nd edn, Paris, 1955), p. 512, (trans.) R. Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth-Century Popes* (Liber

Pontificalis), TTH, 13 (2nd edn, Liverpool, 2007), p. 168, *Life of Hadrian I*, ch. 88. My emphasis.

⁴⁰ Anastasius Bibliothecarius, retranslated the Acts for John the Deacon, c.874. This is the version edited in *PL* 129, 195–512.

⁴¹ e.g. ‘lest they return to their error’ (ne ad eorum reverterentur errorem); MGH Epp. 5, Karolini Aevi, 3, p. 57, 11. 4–5.

⁴² MGH Ep. 5, Karolini Aevi, 3, p. 56, l. 10.

⁴³ *Libri Carolini*, book 3, chapter 13; *PL* 98, 1136–38.

⁴⁴ Even though this information is excluded from the lengthy *Liber Pontificalis* entry on Leo III, as Davis, *The Lives of the Eighth Century Popes*, p. 173, notes.

⁴⁵ e.g. Treadgold, *A History*, p. 87; Garland, ‘Constantine VI and Irene’, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*, <http://www.roman-emperors.org/irene.htm> (2002) (accessed 12.2.12): ‘[Charlemagne] was crowned by Pope Leo on 25 December 800, the pope arguing that the imperial throne was technically vacant as it was occupied by a woman’, citing Theophanes, AM 6289, who does not make this assertion, or even mention Eirene in association with Charlemagne’s coronation, either here or at AM 6293 (see n. 48 below).

⁴⁶ *Kölner Dombibliothek 83 II*, fol. 14v, (ed.) B. Krusch, *Studien zur christlichmittelalterlichen Chronologie: der 84-jährige Osterzyklus und seine Quellen*, vol. 1, part 2 (Leipzig, 1880), p. 195, (trans.) R. Landes, ‘Lest the Millenium Be Fulfilled: Apocalyptic Expectations and the Pattern of Western Chronography 100–800CE’, in W. Verbeke et al. (eds), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Leuven, 1988), pp. 137–211, at 189. H. Löwe, ‘Eine Kölner Notiz zum Kaisertum Karls des Grossen’, *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter*, 14 (1949): pp. 7–34, at 7, dated the Cologne text to October–December of 798, and thus the embassy itself to 798. The various interpretations of the text are surveyed by C. Lux, *Die Kaiserkrönung Karls des Grossen* (Norderstedt, 2007), pp. 14–17.

⁴⁷ See Herrin, *Formation of Christendom*, p. 454 and n. 26. Herrin, *ibid.*, disputes the assumption behind the Cologne text’s claim ‘that Irene’s embassy to Charles in 798 proposed to hand over to him the empire in the West ... that Irene could only operate from a position of weakness’, while noting that the interpretation has been accepted by ‘several modern historians’.

⁴⁸ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6293, p. 475.

⁴⁹ P. Grierson, ‘The Carolingian Empire in the Eyes of Byzantium’, in *Nascita dell’Europa ed Europa carolingia: un’equazione da verificare*, Settimane di studio de Centro italiano di Studi sull’alto Medioevo 27 (19–25 April 1979) (Spoleto, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 885–918, at 885.

⁵⁰ Grierson, ‘The Carolingian Empire’, p. 908: ‘But it [the marriage proposal] cannot have been serious: one can no more imagine Charlemagne in Constantinople than Eirene at Aachen.’

⁵¹ As a letter from Pope Nicholas I to Michael III in 865 indicates: ‘For behold, in the beginning of your letter you called yourself emperor of the Romans, and yet you do not hesitate to call the Latin language “barbarous”’ (Ecce enim in principio epistolae vestrae imperatorem vos nuncupastis Romanorum et tamen Romanam linguam barbaram appellare non veremini), *Ep.* 8, MGH Epp., 6, tom. 4, p. 459, 11. 25–6.

⁵² R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 141.

⁵³ *ARF*, anno 801, (eds) G.H. Pertz and F. Kurze, MGH SSRGius, 6 (Hannover, 1895), p. 112. Nicephorus’ deposition of Eirene is mentioned in *ARF*, anno 803, MGH SSRGius, 6, p. 118.

⁵⁴ This important text survives in a single manuscript: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek cod. 515, fols 1–5r, l. 10, (ed.) F. Unterkircher, *Das Wiener Fragment der Lorscher Annalen, Christus und die Samariterin. Katechese des Niceta von Remesiana. Codex Vindobonensis 515 der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Facsimile Ausgabe*, Codices Selecti, 15 (Graz, 1967).

⁵⁵ *AL*, anno 801, MGH SS, 1, p. 38 (my emphasis).

⁵⁶ McKitterick, *History and Memory*, p. 104.

⁵⁷ ‘When King Charles was delayed at Rome, messengers were sent to him, saying that among the Greeks the title of emperor had ceased, and *they had a woman ruler there*. Then it seemed right to the apostolic Leo himself, and to all the holy fathers who were at that council, and to the rest of the Christian people, that they ought to acclaim as emperor Charles himself, king of the Franks, because he held Rome itself, the mother of empire, where caesars and emperors had always been accustomed to reside’ (Cum apud Romam moraretur rex Karolus, nuncii delati sunt ad eum, dicentes quod apud Graecos nomen imperatoris cessasset, et femineum imperium apud se haberent. Tunc visum est ipso apostolico Leoni et universis sanctis patribus qui in ipso concilio aderant, seu reliquo christiano populo, ut ipsum Carolum, regem Francorum, imperatorem nominare debuissent, quia ipsam Romam matrem imperii tenebat, ubi semper Caesares et imperatores sedere soliti fuerant), *CM*, anno 801, MGH SS, 1, p. 305 (my emphasis). The text is almost identical to *AL*, anno 801, cited above.

⁵⁸ P.J. Geary, ‘Un fragment récemment découvert du Chronicon Moissiacense’, *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes*, 136 (1978): pp. 69–73, at 69. H.K. Mann, *The Lives of the Popes in the Early Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (2nd edn, London, 1925; repr. 2010), p. 226, asserts that *CM* is almost identical to *Annales Veteres Francorum*, on which see below.

⁵⁹ Geary, ‘Un fragment’, pp. 72–3.

⁶⁰ [femineum imperium apud se haberent]. Cf. nn. 55 and 57 above.

⁶¹ [finem apud eos nomen imperii teneret], *AVF* MGH SS, 1, p. 305 (right column). The gloss on *finem* (*femina*) has presumably been provided by the modern editor of the text, who was comparing it with the text of *CM*.

⁶² Palaeographically it is more likely that *finem* would be misread as *femineum*, or *femina*, than vice versa, given the use of abbreviations *supra lineam*, which were often expanded wrongly in the copying of a manuscript.

⁶³ According to the scriptural text (2 Kgs 11:1–3; cf. 2 Chr 22:10–12), on the death of King Ahaziah his mother Atalia (Athaliah) made herself queen, killing all Ahaziah’s sons (and her grandsons) but one, Joash. Atalia was killed six years later when Joash came forward to claim the throne.

⁶⁴ *AVF*, anno 801, MGH SS, 1, p. 305.

⁶⁵ T.F.X. Noble and T. Head, Preface to *Life of Saint Willehad*, in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), p. 279. Other scholars, they note, believe the *Life* was a product of the 850s. Noble and Head’s claim that it is the first text to mention the transfer of rule to Charlemagne does not take account of the earlier *Annales Laurashamenses*; cf. McKitterick, *History and Memory*, p. 104.

⁶⁶ *Life of Saint Willehad*, 5, (trans.) Noble and Head, *Soldiers of Christ*, p. 285. *Acta Sanctorum* Nov. 3, (ed.) A. Poncelet (Brussels, 1910), col. 844B.

⁶⁷ Contra B.E. Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA; London, 2009), pp. 18–19, who claimed that this text, as well as *Annales Regni Francorum* and *Chronicon Moissiacense*, declared ‘that the dignity of empire had ceased among the Greeks because a woman, Empress Irene, had sat on

the throne'. The three Frankish sources are identified by Whalen at *ibid.*, p. 19, n. 33.

⁶⁸ M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium*, p. 304. See Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 16, (ed.) O. Holder-Egger MGH SSRG, 25 (Hannover, 1911; repr. 1965), p. 20, 11. 1–4: 'However, he established a very solid treaty with them on account of his assumption of the title of emperor, and the fact that he seemed [to them] likely to want to snatch power from them' (Cum quibus tamen propter susceptum a se imperatoris nomen et ob hoc [eis] quasi qui imperium eis eripere uellet, valde susceptum foedus firmissimum statuit).

⁶⁹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ch. 28, MGH SSRG, 25, p. 25, 11. 32–3. 'He patiently bore with the jealousy which the Roman emperors showed upon his assumption of these titles, for they very much resented this step; and by frequent embassies and letters, in which he addressed them as brothers, he overcame their hauteur with his magnanimity, a quality in which he was unquestionably much their superior' (Invidiam tamen suscepti nominis, Romanis imperatoribus super hoc indignantibus, magna tulit patientia. Vicitque eorum contumaciam magnanimitate, qua eis procul dubio longe praestantior erat, mittendo ad eos crebras legationes et in epistolis fratres eos appellando).

⁷⁰ Notker the Stammerer, *Gestorum Karoli*, MGH SSRG, 12, pp. 1–93.

⁷¹ Alcuin, *Ep.* 174 to Charlemagne, MGH Epp., 4, p. 288, 11. 20–22: 'The imperial dignity and secular power of the second Rome is a different matter; how wickedly the ruler of that empire was deposed, not by strangers but by his own people and fellow-citizens is known everywhere, with rumour telling the tale' (Alia est imperialis dignitas et secundae Romae saecularis potentia; quam impie gubernator imperii illius depositus sit, non ab alienis, sed a propriis et concivibus, ubique fama narrante crebrescit).

⁷² e.g. the signature 'Eirene pistos basileus', on two *novellae* issued in the 790s, (ed.) C.E. Zachariae a Lingenthal, *Jus Graeco-Romanum*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1856–84) p. 55. J. Haldon notes that these two *novellae*, together with the *Ekloga* of Leo III and Constantine V, constitute virtually the sum total of imperial legislation between the final years of Herakleios (d.641), and the middle of Basil I's reign (867–86): John Haldon, 'Primary Sources', in E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon and R. Cormack (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 21–30, at 27.

⁷³ S. Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (Cleveland, OH, 1933; repr. 1970), pp. 56–7.

⁷⁴ L. Brubaker and H. Tobler, 'The Gender of Money: Byzantine Empresses on Coins (324–802)', in Stafford and Mulder-Bakker (eds), *Gendering the Middle Ages*, pp. 42–64, at 59–60.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60; cf. figures 9, 10, 11 and 12.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization*, p. 57 n. 14: '[Her sole rule] was something of an innovation, and in official documents it was thought best to call her Eirene the Emperor; but there was no constitutional opposition to it.'

⁷⁸ Greatrex, 'Pulcheria'.

⁷⁹ Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom*, p. 456: 'Whether disapproval of Irene's presidency over the false council [of 787] was compounded by her later assumption of sole rule, her claim to reign as emperor was used as an additional western argument against Constantinople.'

⁸⁰ Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization*, p. 57.

⁸¹ Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, pp. 82–3.

⁸² Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6293, p. 475, relates how she cancelled the

levies on the customs houses of Abydos and Hieron, which controlled the sea-traffic into and out of Constantinople. Nicephorus I reinstated the taxes in 809/810, according to Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6302, pp. 486–7.

⁸³ Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 94: ‘Part of Irene’s problem may have been that she never felt secure in power. Her regency began with a revolt on the part of her brothers-in-law, and she knew she could not count on the *tagmata* and some of the *strategoi*.’

Chapter 8

The Brides of 1420: Men Looking at Women's Bodies¹

Diana Gilliland Wright

Perhaps few other women were looked at so intently by Byzantine men as were the brides of 1420. The stories of Sophia of Montferrat and Cleofe Malatesta and their disastrous marriages to sons of Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) – John VIII and Theodoros, respectively – have been told individually a number of times, but they have not been previously regarded as variants of the same essential story of rejection. This chapter will examine the variants, and will suggest questions that might be considered, even if they prove ultimately unanswerable. For example, to what extent was what these men saw and said influenced by the fact that Sophia of Montferrat and Cleofe Malatesta of Pesaro were not Greek? As Italian women of the early Renaissance, they brought with them manners and dress quite different from those expected of upper-class Greek women.

To begin with, it is likely that these women were so visible because they were so differently dressed, and their dress made more of them visible than Greek dress would have. In the simplest distinction of dress, Byzantine dress concealed as much as possible of a woman's hair, neck, and shape, while Italian dress bared the neck, emphasised the bosom, and favoured ornate, up-swept hair. Georgios Gemistos Plethon complimented Cleofe on giving up this dress, and her leisurely (ἀνέσσεως) Italian ways in exchange for the decorous ways of 'our women'. This distinction had already been considered before the marriages and, presumably, dealt with in the prenuptial negotiations. Her husband-to-be, Theodoros, had said she could keep her customary worship 'and other things'.²

Both brides had been chosen for the marriage gambit which was ostensibly to contribute to church union, a prerequisite for western military aid to Constantinople.³ Both brides came from families with Greek interests and both may have been able to speak some Greek.⁴ Both brides were sexually rejected by their husbands. Although the reasons for these rejections are not completely clear, the sexuality of neither man is in question. John had other women, and was later happily married;⁵ Theodoros, although he lived with Cleofe for the

first six years without sex, then apparently took to it with delight. Marriages do not occur in isolation: family dynamics are always relevant, but the sources do not give us enough information about relationships between Manuel II, his wife Helena and their sons to warrant speculation.⁶

Sophia of Montferrat

Three of the four major historians of the period – Doukas, Chalcocondyles and Sphrantzes – provide differing accounts of Sophia, although Doukas' narrative is by far the most detailed. An evaluation of the only English translation of Doukas, that of Magoulias, reveals strong preconceptions on the part of the translator, if not of Doukas or of the witnesses. Because this is the translation most used by writers, it is worth considering how it reads:⁷

Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Ἰωάννης ἦν μὲ στέργων τὴν σύνοικον, ἡ κόρη γὰρ τῷ μὲν σώματι καὶ μάλα εὐάρμοστος, τράχηλος εὐειδής, θρίξ ὑποξανθίζουσα καὶ τοὺς πλοκάμους ὡς ῥύακας χρυσαυγίζοντας μέγρι τῶν ἀστραγάλων καταρεομένους ἔχουσα, ὤμους πλατεῖς καὶ βραχίονας καὶ στέρνα καὶ χεῖρας ἐμμέτρους καὶ δακτύλους κρυσταλλοειδεῖς καὶ τὴν πᾶσαν ἡλικίαν τοῦ σώματος ἀνωρρέπη καὶ πολλὴ εἰς τὸ ὄρθιον ἰσταμένη, ὄψις δὲ καὶ χεῖλη καὶ ῥινὸς κατὰστασικαὶ ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ὀφρύων σύνθεσις ἀειδεστάτη, παντάπασιν ὡς ἔπος χυδαῖον εἰπεῖν, “Ἀφ’ ἐμπρὸς τεσσαρακοστὴ καὶ ὀπισθεν πάσχα.”

[The young woman was extremely well-proportioned in body. Her neck was shapely, her hair blondish with braids flowing down to her ankles like glimmering golden streams. Her shoulders were broad and her arms, bosom, and hands well proportioned. Her fingers were transparent. She was tall in stature and stood very straight – *but her face and lips and the malformation of her nose and eyes and eyebrows presented a most revolting composition*. In general, she may be described in the words of the vulgar adage: ‘Lent from the front and Easter from behind.’]

The Greek does not justify such extreme terms and the italicised passage is more accurately translated as: ‘her face and lips, the condition of her nose, and the arrangement of her eyes and eyebrows were extremely unpleasant’.⁸ If that does not make things much better for Sophia, it does not make her grotesque. Chalcocondyles is gentler:⁹

... ἐπιεικὴ μὲν τὸν τρόπον, ἀηδὴ δὲ τὴν ὄψιν, διαδήματι ταινιώσας ἀρχιερέα τε καὶ βασιλέα ἐστήσατο τοῖς Ἑλλησι. ταύτην μὲν οὖν, ὡς οὔτε συνώκει συνεγένετο ἐς ἔχθος ἀφικόμενος καὶ ἀηδῶς ἔχων αὐτῇ ἐπὶ τινα χρόνον, καὶ ἦ τε γυνὴ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐνέωρα ἐς αὐτὴν τὸν ἄνδρα ἀηδῶς ἔχοντα, καὶ ἀπεχθάνεσθαι τῷ ἄνδρι ἐς τὰ μάλιστα.

[She was pleasant in manner, but not attractive in face. Crowned with the diadem, he [John] was made high priest and king over the Greeks. As for her, as he did not live with her; he became hostile and disagreeable to her for a time, and the wife of the emperor [Sophia] noticed that her husband was behaving disagreeably and that she was very hateful to her husband.]

Chalcocondyles has shifted the emphasis of the story from Sophia's unsatisfactory face to John's unpleasant behaviour, which he cannot get around.¹⁰

Sphrantzes – who as an aide to Manuel II would actually have seen Sophia – merely says that she arrived, they were married, and there was a festival of festivals (ἐορτῶν ἐορτῇ καὶ πανηγύρις πανηγύρεων).¹¹ Sphrantzes' loyalty and affection for Manuel and John would have rendered him incapable of writing anything that might be taken as criticism of them. However, the Pseudo-Sphrantzes adds the information, probably obtained from one of the patriarchal chronicles, that John loved other women (ἐρασθαι τὸν βασιλέα ἑτέρας γυναιξίν), and that Sophia was 'not put together very well' (οὐκ ἐκ φύσεως ἐστολισμένη ὠραιότητα), information probably obtained from Doukas.¹² All four reports agree that Sophia was unattractive, and nothing suggests otherwise.

This gives rise to the question as to whether the marchese of Montferrat and the pope would have actually shipped out a deformed bride. Would a woman as unattractive as these accounts suggest have even been considered for marriage? Would she not have taken herself out of the transaction?¹³ Upper-class women with serious disfigurements were usually given into some convent at an early age.¹⁴ Or would the marchese and the pope have calculated that the anticipated political advantages and a large dowry would have made any woman attractive, especially one with such an admirable bosom and hair? Unfortunately, we have no information about the dowries from either Sophia or Cleofe, but a hundred years earlier, the dowry of Irene of Montferrat (Sophia's great-great grandmother) provided 'many thousand gold coins' to rebuilt the buttresses of Hagia Sophia.¹⁵

Sophia arrived in Constantinople in November. The last writer on Byzantine ceremony, Pseudo-Kodinos, gives instructions for the reception of a foreign bride of an emperor or emperor's son. It begins, significantly for Sophia's story, thus:¹⁶

Χρή ται τοῦτο γινώσκειν, ὅτι δεσποίνης νύμφης ἐρχομένης ἔξωθεν ἢ δια ξερᾶς ἢ δια θαλάσσης, κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν καθ' ἣν μέλλει ἀποσσωθῆναι εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἐγνωσμένην οὖσαν, προσυπαντᾷ ταύτην ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς ὁ νεόνυμφος μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ.

[One should know that at the arrival of the imperial bride, whether by land or by water, when the day when she is to be brought safely into port at The

City is known, the emperor, her husband-to-be goes to meet her with his father.]

If Constantinople still kept to the Pseudo-Kodinos formalities,¹⁷ John and Manuel would have gone together to welcome Sophia. She would first have been received as an empress by the wives of the highest-ranking men of the court. Then, after the emperors had come and gone, the wives would have dressed her as an empress, with the red shoes, and there would have been a horseback procession up to the Blachernae.¹⁸ Magoulias translates Doukas to say that John wanted to send her back ‘when he first laid eyes on her’, but that he could not do so because of his affection for his father.¹⁹ However the Greek gives no sense of timing, and the matter of affection is ambiguous. Was it John’s affection for his father, or Manuel’s affection for Sophia?

The wedding was not held until 19 January, which means that Sophia was in the palace for two months where, according to Pero Tafur, the living quarters were extremely cramped.²⁰ When did she know what her marriage was to mean? Presumably, John crowned her – Pseudo-Kodinos gives us the procedure by which emperors crowned their wives – and then had nothing to do with her. Did John and the palace advisers work out that this would be the way in which they *could* live separately? A husband and wife could always be incompatible, but to return her unmarried would probably have meant returning a very large dowry as well as incurring the enmity of the pope and damaging what sparse hopes Manuel might still have had.

Granted that Sophia was not conventionally attractive, I suggest that John’s rejection may not have depended solely on her face. She was a large woman – recall Doukas’ description of her as tall with broad shoulders. John was described by his contemporaries as a small man, as was Manuel, and passages in de Pigli and Syropoulos suggest that he was acutely concerned about his public image.²¹ This blond woman who was probably a good bit taller and broader than John would have been difficult for him to deal with, even had she been a beauty.

In August 1426, a date that may be significant in the course of the Cleofe story, Sophia left Constantinople on a Majorcan ship hired at such short notice that it had to leave behind on the wharf the Genoese goods which it had been originally chartered to transport.²² The ship took Sophia and her attendants across the Golden Horn to Galata, where the Genovese residents came down to the waterfront and paid homage to her as their empress. When she arrived home in Montferrat, she was again received as empress. Throughout the whole sequence of events, everyone, with the exception of John, had been very kind to her. Sophia took her imperial crown back to Montferrat

with her. In Greek rite weddings, the celebrant crowns the bride and bridegroom, and exchanges their crowns. John had been crowned at the wedding, as emperor. Sophia was crowned empress the next day, and all she had to show for it was the crown that John had put on her head.²³

Cleofe Malatesta

Unlike Sophia, we have no descriptions of Cleofe, and, also unlike Sophia, Cleofe was universally agreed to be beautiful. There are no identifiable images of her, but there is a portrait thought to be of her sister, Paola Malatesta di Gonzaga, and a seal of their cousin Carlo, Lord of Pesaro. These, taken together with a portrait of an unidentified woman in a fresco by Pisanello in Paola's Mantua castle may suggest something of her appearance.²⁴ The primary sources, apart from a brief and oblique note in Chalcocondyles,²⁵ are five monodies from Mistra intellectuals, two letters from Pope Martin V, a poem by Theodoros, and seven personal letters by Cleofe, her sister Paola, Lady of Mantua, and their brother's wife, Battista Montefeltro di Malatesta, who took the role of Lady of Pesaro for her father-in-law.²⁶

Cleofe arrived at Mistra in the autumn of 1420 and was there for at least three months before the wedding was celebrated. Again, when did this bride learn what the nature of her marriage was to be? At some point, Theodoros told her that they would be chaste.²⁷ They had lived like this for six years. Was this an act of rebellion against his father, or a manifestation of the religious impulses that possessed him episodically over the next seven years? Or, if we were to make his body an issue in a discussion of hers, was it his reaction to his doctor's teachings about the causes of gout?²⁸ For those six years Cleofe disappears from surviving written records, except for the information that her sister Paola sent her cheese from Mantua every year.²⁹

Despite Theodoros' promise to Pope Martin V that Cleofe could retain her religion, and her Italian customs,³⁰ her manner of dress – and thus, her decision on what was or was not seen of her body – appears to have become a source of contention. The purchases of cloth in Paola's account books suggest that she sent cloth to Cleofe in Mistra, and one can understand why Cleofe would have wanted her to. The specialist who analysed Italian fabrics found in a Mistra grave wrote: 'Most Byzantine fabrics are dense and relatively thick; it seems that the criteria of lightness and suppleness were not prevalent in Byzantium', and commented about the softness and lightness of the fabrics from the grave.³¹

A letter from Battista to Paola in February 1427 implies that Cleofe was dressing as a nun. A mutual friend Cleofe Malatesta who had visited Cleofe reported her saying: 'I have not become a nun because I was anointed with a little oil. Be sure that I am as free in my heart as I ever was.'³² A year later she gave birth to a daughter, Helena. Four years after Helena's birth, on Good Friday, 10 April 1433, she died in a second childbirth.

At the 40-day *μνημόσυον*, the intellectuals of Mistra came together to give their monodies. The ageing George Gemistos complimented her 'sober prudence in putting off her leisurely Italian ways and taking up the decorous restraint of our women,' and commended her fasting (*ἀστίαις*).³³ Nikeforas Cheilas in turn addressed her: 'You paid no heed to the pleasure of the belly and ... you remained upright all night, not on your knees, but devoted to prayer.'³⁴ It would seem that this means more than that she had recently observed the Lenten fast.³⁵ That alone would have been unremarkable for a woman in Greece. Still, the frequency of the topic of clothes within the documentation about Cleofe does indicate that her Italian finery was a problem for Theodoros, and perhaps for some others. Court protocol in Constantinople had called for Sophia's dress to be changed immediately upon her arrival: there was not enough time for her clothing to have become an issue for someone. We have no information on such protocol for Mistra, and there had not been an empress (*βασίλισσα*) for nearly 25 years.³⁶ What had been an all-male court for a generation was having to make a great many adjustments.³⁷

Demetrios Pepagomenos, Cleofe's grandfatherly doctor, explicitly said that she was dressing as a nun, except for official ceremonies. He spoke tactfully, but in a way that suggested he thought it a shame. He followed Gemistos' compliment with:³⁸

Τὸ δὲ γε πόρρω τῆς ἡμετέρας μὲν συνθέσεως, εἴτ' οὖν κράσεως καὶ ψυχικῆς ὡς εἰπεῖν ἀνάγκης, αὐλοῦ δὲ τινος καὶ ἀσωμάτου φύσεως ἔργον καὶ ὅλως ἄμικτον τῆς ἐνταῦθα προσπαθείας τε καὶ βιωτικῆς ἀπάσης ἀνάγκης, ὅτι γε καὶ μετὰ τὴν τοσαύτην ἀπάθειαν καὶ τῆς τελεωτέρας, ὡς κάκεινῃ ἐδόκει ὁσημέρῃ τυχεῖν φέτο τάξεώς τε καὶ πολιτείας. Οὐδὲν γὰρ τοῦ τελείου τελειότερον ἂν γένοιτό ποτε οὐ μᾶλλον, ἢ τὸν τρόπον ἐξαλλάσσει τὸ ἐνδυμα. Ἀλλ' ὅμως ἦν ἂν πολὺν τινα καὶ πρὸ τῆς τελευτῆς χρόνον τοῦτο δὴ τὸ νενομισμένον τοῖς μονάζουσι φέρουσα σχῆμα εἰ μὴ τοῖς τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἐδεσμεῖτο συνθήκαις· ὃ καὶ κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν λανθάνειν ἐδόκει τοῖς ἐξωθεν, ὕστερον δὲ πᾶσι γέγονε δῆλον.

[The wearing of clothes outside our habits of dress, beyond our temperament and sense of what, so to speak, is naturally required, was a matter of her non-material and spiritual nature, one unassociated with worldly passion or any kind of bodily necessity, because she aimed, in her unconcern with such

matters, at what seemed to her always to be a more perfect order and self-governance. Not that there might ever be perfection more perfect than perfection, or that clothing will change character, but nonetheless, *there was some length of time before the end*, when, unless she was constrained by official ceremonies, she wore the fashion of those who live monastically (μονάζουσι), so that what was earlier unappreciated by outsiders, was now obvious to all.]³⁹

That statement, ‘some length of time before the end’, is an important one, and the dates of the cluster of Italian letters – all from an 18-month period – possibly provide information on what it means.

Let us go over the known chronology in more detail, remembering that it comes from nine surviving letters,⁴⁰ many of which say that the *bearer* will tell the reader the important news: January 1427 is the date that marked the end of the six-year period during which Cleofe and Theodoros had lived celibately. In early October, three months before, Cleofe had written to Paola and asked that she pray for the safety of her soul.⁴¹ Sophia had eloped from Constantinople the previous August: there was time for word of the event to have come to Mistra, and very likely Theodoros found himself forced to consider that Cleofe might make a similar choice. In January, Paola and Battista must both have had letters or messengers from Cleofe as they both wrote letters to Pope Martin V. Battista asked him to come to the defence of his most constant daughter in her ‘domestic and intestine war’.⁴² The undated letters from Martin V must have been stimulated by the women’s requests. In these letters, Martin expounded to Theodoros on the truth of the Roman rite and expressed his hope that Theodoros would not turn Cleofe to eastern rites and ceremonies. His letter to Cleofe was considerably shorter, warning her for the safety of her soul not to turn from the Roman church.⁴³

Battista wrote to Paola on 12 February that she had written to their brother, Pandolfo, archbishop of Patras, to see if there was anything he could do to help. According to Battista, Jacomo de Sancto Agnola, who had spoken to Cleofe privately, reported the change of dress, while quoting Cleofe’s statement that a little oil had not made her a nun, and that her heart was as free as ever.⁴⁴ This, then, is what Pepagomenos meant when he said, ‘some length of time before the end’. It appears that only now has Cleofe changed her dress and only now has Cleofe’s family learned that she has spent six years in a sexless marriage.

On 26 January, 1428 – a year after the end of the six-year period – Cleofe wrote to her sister with concern: ‘Make prayers for my soul, for about my body I do not care.’⁴⁵ She said she did not have time to write more, and that Paola should write to their brother for more information. Two months later, on 20 March, she wrote a long letter

with a powerful description of postpartum depression – ‘I cannot stop crying ... There is not enough paper to write down all my feelings.’⁴⁶ The only way we know that she has given birth to a daughter is a reference to ‘[the daughter] who was born’.⁴⁷ The letter, and probably others, was being brought to Mantua and Pesaro by an ambassador from Mistra, the megakartofylax, whom they were sending to her father and the pope, presumably with the formal announcement of the birth.⁴⁸

From these survivals, a scenario can be constructed in which Theodoros, approaching the end of the six-year period and learning of Sophia’s elopement, realised both that Cleofe might herself decide to leave, and that what he really wanted was not an end but a union,⁴⁹ although his religious convictions (probably enforced by at least one of his advisers) apparently required her conversion. It is quite likely that when he told her this she wrote the October letter, asking for prayers for her soul while she made her decision. In January Cleofe evidently performed the necessary public acts of conversion – a statement of faith and an anointing with oil – and took up the dress of a Greek nun.⁵⁰ Despite remarks by some that she converted willingly, it is difficult to accept this after reading of her deep distress, and how a friend has reported back to her family that she was deliberately allowing her husband to think she had converted but that within her heart she remained unchanged.⁵¹ Cleofe’s conversion is the concern of the Italian women, both of them personally deeply religious: nowhere do the Greek men suggest that this had been their concern.⁵²

At some point after the birth of their daughter – there was much turmoil during Cleofe’s pregnancy and the few months afterwards, with Theodoros first deciding to become a monk so that Constantine was sent out to rule, and then deciding against it, and then vacillating for another few months – there was a great shift in the marriage, for which we also have no direct explanation. This shift is reflected in the poem Theodoros wrote after her death.⁵³ The poem shows that for the last three or four years of her life, the two of them found an intense physical and intellectual partnership, and this is confirmed by the monodies. The physician Pepagomenos described their relationship in addressing Cleofe:⁵⁴

Ὁ καὶ μᾶλλον τὴν φλόγα τοῦ κρατοῦντος ἀνάπτει καὶ σφοδροτέραν τὴν ὀδύνην ἐργάζεται ἐννοοῦντος, οἷας ἐστερήθη τῆς παραμυθίας καὶ τῆς ἐπὶ τὰ κρεῖττω τε καὶ τελεώτερα συνάρσεώς τε καὶ βοηθείας. Οὐδὲν γὰρ ὅ τι μὴ τῇ σῇ ἐκοινοῦτο γνώμη, ὅθεν καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐλύετο διὰ σοῦ τῶν δυσχερῶν, τὰ δὲ γε τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας ὄντα καὶ θειοτέρας πολιτείας τε καὶ ἀναβάσεως ἐκυροῦντο πολλῶ τῷ περιοντι τῆς σῆς ἀρετῆς.

[All of this (your death) scorches him (your husband) the more intensely and

causes greater agony as he thinks of what consolation, aid and assistance he has lost against this greater and more final loss. For there was nothing that was not communicated to your judgement and thus some difficult problems were solved, while matters of greater moment, of holy governance and of the (soul's) ascent were determined by the superiority of your virtue.]

A similar passage in the monody by Nikeforas Cheilas describes Cleofe's position:⁵⁵

Οὐ γάρ τοι τὸ φρόνημα ταῖς γυναιξίν ἡμιλλᾶτο, κάκείνων ἔσπευδεν
ὑπερέχειν τῶν τε νῦν τῶν τε πάλαι κρειττόνων, ἀλλ' ἐν γυναιξὶ τελοῦσα
ἀνδρεῖον ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐκέκτητο φρόνημα, κομοῦσα μὲν πραότητι τὴν
ψυχὴν, κομοῦσα δὲ τὴν τῶν ἡθῶν κατασκευὴν φιλοσοφίας ὁροις τε καὶ
πασῶν ἀρετῶν καὶ χαρίτων φιλοτεχνήμασι καὶ τῷ βασιλικῷ
προσήκουσαν ἑαυτὴν ἀποφαίνουσα γένει ... οὕτω δ' ἐν μέσῳ θορύβων ἐν
βασιλείοις οὔσα παντοίας ἀρετῆς ποιουμένη λόγον κάκείοις ἑαυτῇ
ὀλοσχερῶς ἐκδιδουσα, ἐξ ὧν βελτίων κατ' ἄμφω γίγνεσθαι ἤδει.

[She was not, in her mind, in competition with women, even as she worked to surpass the best of them, both ancient and modern, but although she was counted among women, she possessed a truly masculine intelligence, adorning her spirit with gentleness, adorning the constitution of her character with the guidance of philosophy and the practice of all the virtues and graces, and presenting herself as one belonging to a royal race ... In the midst of turmoil, when present among the imperial councillors she gave virtuous advice of every sort and made herself available to help everyone ...

]

While nothing allows us to say that this use of Cleofe's intellectual and spiritual gifts for the assistance of her husband and the great benefit of Mistra was the result of her change of clothes, nothing in the sources excludes her political activity in earlier years, and it seems likely. This was not in itself exceptional: political participation was a normal activity of Palaiologan and Malatesti women. Such genuine affection for Cleofe and grief at her death is shown in these monodies that it is not necessary to be concerned with the *topos* that intelligence was a masculine virtue; it seems irrelevant here.⁵⁶ Much more striking is the fact that – allowing for exaggerations implicit in imperial eulogy – she was regarded as so valuable that George Gemistos used the word 'salvation' (τὴν σωτηρίαν) in speaking of what her virtue had done for them.⁵⁷ Similarly, Pepagomenos said:⁵⁸

Τέθνηκε γὰρ ἡ βασίλισσα τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ταῦτόν δ' εἰπεῖν ὁ τοῦ γένους
παντὸς ὀφθαλμός, τὸ κοινὸν τῆς [τῆς] οἰκουμένης ἀγλαΐσμα, ὁ ἀστραβῆς
κίων, ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα ἡ τῶν ὑπὸ χεῖρα ἐσαλεύετο τύχη. Ὡς πῶς πάντ' ἄνω καὶ
κάτω τὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πεποίηκε προσδοκώμενα ἡ τῆς βασιλείας ἡμῶν
τελευτὴ καὶ μέρος οὐδὲν ἀφῆχε τῆς τοῦ γένους ἐλπίδος ἀλώβητον.
Οἶχεται γὰρ ὁ σύνδεσμος τῆς βασιλείας καὶ νεκρὰ πάντα καὶ εἰς οὐδὲν
μεμένηκεν οὐ τὰ ὄντα μόνον Ῥωμαίοις, ἀλλὰ γε καὶ τὰ ἐσόμενα καὶ τὰ

χείρω περι ἡμῶν μαντεύεσθαι πείθει καὶ τέλος οὐδέν τῶν δεινῶν προσδοκᾶν. Οὕτω διὰ πάντων ἐχώρησε τὸ δεινὸν σκηπτοῦ τινος δίκην πάντα διακαίοντος καὶ ἀποτεφροῦντος καὶ μηδέ ποτε τῆς νομῆς ἀπειλοῦντος ἀφέξεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ἅπαν τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων καταναλώσῃ κατάλειμμα. Ὡς πῶς διὰ τῆς σῆς πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἐπιδημίας, πάντα μὲν ἡμῖν ἐγένετο τὰ χρηστὰ ἀφείλε δὲ ταῦτα καὶ μετὰ πολλῆς τινος τῆς προσθήκης ἢ σύντροφος δυστυχία τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν τῷ σε νῦν ἀφ' ἡμῶν πρὸ καιροῦ γενέσθαι καὶ ἐν τοιαύτῃ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀμωμάλῃα.

[The queen of the Romans is dead, the very eye of the people, the shared ornament of the inhabited world, the steadfast pillar, while all our present fortune totters. How the death of our queen has turned the expectations of the Romans upside down and has left none of the hopes of our race intact. The bond of union of the monarchy is gone, all is dead and nothing remains, not just of the present for the Romans but of what is to come as well, and it persuades us to prophesy the worst and to expect no end of distress. This horror has run through us like a thunderbolt, burning everything out and turning it to ash, threatening never to give up possession until it consumes all of what is left of the Romans. All the best for us came with your settling among us, and our congenital misfortune has taken away all this, and more besides, in your being gone from us in such an unnatural way.]

This conveys an extraordinary sense of the doom that must have saturated the educated of that culture, if not the general population. Theodoros had, 10 years earlier, unsuccessfully tried to give away to Venice the Morea that he could not defend, and his brother had given the Venetians Thessalonike which *they* could not defend either. A generation earlier, Adam of Usk reported that Greeks whom he had met in Rome told him that ‘their empire is almost worn out by the attacks of Turks and Tartars’ (‘Habui ultra quod per Tartaros et Turcos ipsorum imperium stat quasi exinanitum’).⁵⁹ Similarly, Kydones had written to Manuel Kantakuzenos as early as 1353 that the Byzantines could not ultimately withstand the Turks.⁶⁰

How was it that Cleofe was seen, even rhetorically, as the Byzantines’ sole bulwark against the Turks? The sources give us no way to answer this question. Even considering her political skills, considering the great generosity that Cheilas reports, considering the philanthropy and patronage that Bessarion mentioned, considering her care of the poor – even to the extent of bringing firewood and cooking for them – and her improvement of the lives of women at court,⁶¹ what permits Pepagomenos to conclude his monody with this statement?⁶²

Σὸν οὖν ἂν εἶη, ἡ ταῖς σαῖς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον λιταῖς ἀμέσως παρισταμένην Θεῶν λύειν τοῦ κρατοῦντος τὰ δυσχερῆ καὶ διὰ τούτου καὶ τὴν κοινὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων δυστυχίαν—δύνασαι γὰρ τοῦτ', εὐ οἶδα, εἰ κατανεύσειας μόνον—ἢ διὰ βίου ἑάσαι πενθεῖν καὶ ὀδύρεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ὁ ἥλιος ἐπὶ γῆς τὰς ἀκτῖνας ἀφίη.

[It would be in your power, either with your prayers to the divine, as you stand immediately beside God, to alleviate the distress of our ruler, and through this the misfortune of the entire Roman people—you can do this, I know, with a mere nod of assent—or to leave us to mourn and lament throughout life, as long as the sun sends its rays over the earth.]

Cleofe in the position of both Zeus and the Panagia is a stunning image!

Mistra's individual and collective grief is articulated in terms that indicate their profoundly physical loss. Even George Gemistos, before he complimented the change of dress and fasting, spoke of the beauty of her luminous body and her even more luminous soul.⁶³ This, too, is something of a *topos* in Byzantine discourse, but its appearance in an otherwise abstract speech of philosophical theory surprises.⁶⁴ Dr Pepagomenos, who had seen as much of her body as anyone, wrote, returning again and again to the idea of doom:⁶⁵

Ἡ τις ἂν μείζων γένοιτο συμφορὰ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κοινοῦ κόσμου τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀπολωλότος; Ἡ πῶς ἂν τις οἰκείως στενάξειε καὶ κλαύσαιοι μάλιστα ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς τοιοῖσδε κακοῖς ἐνθυμησεῖς, ὅτι πάντα μὲν συνήλθον ἐντονώτατα καλὰ καὶ ἐν ἀπειργάσαιντο τὸ τῆς θειοτάτης ἡμῖν βασιλίσσης σῶμα, οὕτω μὲν εὐφυῶς, οὕτω δ' ἐναρμονίως, εἰς τοσαύτην δ' εὐημερίαν τοῦ γένους ἐσομενον, ἄωρος δ' οὕτω καὶ παρὰ τὰς τῆς φύσεως προσδοκίας ἀπέπτη, πένθος ἀπολιπὼν μὴ ὅ τι γε ἡμῖν τοῖς ὑπηκόοις μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ὅλως εἰς Ῥωμαίους τέλουσιν.

[What greater disaster might come than what has destroyed the whole world of the Romans? Might one more properly lament or most absolutely bewail, recalling these ills, that all the beauty coming together and *brought to perfection in the body of our holy queen, so well-formed*, so harmonious as to bring future happiness to the race, should so unseasonally and against nature be taken away, leaving behind sorrow not only to us, her subjects, but to all who are accounted as Roman.]

Then he moved to the idea of the ultimate concealment of her body in the grave and its essential wrongness:⁶⁶

Τί γάρ, οὐκ ἂν τις τῶν τῆς κειμένης ἐν τε σμίκροτάτῳ χώρῳ συνεχρομένης δικαίως ὀδύραιτο, πότερον τὴν ἡλικίαν, ἐν ᾗ τοσαύτην εἶχε τὴν χάριν καὶ ἦν ἔχουσα οἷχεται, ἢ τὴν ὥραν, ἢ ὡς ἐχρῆν μᾶλλον ... οὐδ' ὡς ἐχρῆν γέγονε δ' οὖν.

[Is it not the case that any of them would justly mourn what was brought together but lasted for so short a time: her youth, in which she had such grace, and which she has taken away with her, or *the beauty, which has not been concealed* as might have been proper, but *in an evil manner* ... this is not how it should have been.]

Pepagomenos was followed by Nikeforas Cheilas, the least known and

perhaps most poetic of the speakers, who accused the doctor of killing his patient. After his opening fury subsided, Cheilas spoke movingly, going beyond Pepagomenos to transmute Cleofe's body from flesh into light in an incomparable conjunction of metaphors:⁶⁷

Ἵκετο γὰρ τὸ πασῶν τέμενος ἀρετῶν καὶ χαρίτων ἢ τε τῇ λαμπροτάτῃ τοῦ σώματος ὥρα ἱρις ἐξαστράπτουσα τῷ ὄντι θειοτάτῃ βασιλῆς καὶ ἀνδριάντος παντός καὶ ἀγάλματος κρείττων, ἢ δὴ καὶ τῷ θειοτάτῳ δεσπότη καὶ γήματα νι διηνεκῶς, ὡς εἰπεῖν, παρεστῶσα πᾶσιν ὑπεῖκε τοῖς παρ' αὐτοῦ, καὶ δὴ καὶ λαμπρὰν ἐκαρποῦτό τινα καὶ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν αἴγλην μὴδὲν ἢ τὰ δοκοῦντα οἱ διαπραττομένη.

[Gone is the shrine of all virtues and graces, the most holy queen, the rainbow shining brilliantly in *the beauty of her body*, flashing out more intensely than any statue or image, she that continually, so to speak, as she stood by her husband, the most holy despot, yielded to the men around him and enjoyed a sort of splendor and radiance while doing only what seemed right to her.]

To Cheilas, perhaps a little in love with her himself, she had always been light: 'The land of Hesperia sent her, a light flowing out from a golden race.'⁶⁸ He spoke of her tomb as a 'reliquary' (κιβωτός), and continued with a memorably poignant image of the falling and shattering of a precious crystal – moving from Cleofe as a physical being to pure spirit, a progression that is also seen in the poem Theodoros wrote to her.⁶⁹

Bessarion, the last speaker, was perhaps too close to Cleofe's age to speak freely about her body, particularly as he was a monk, so he made use of the safer *topos* of one body and one flesh, split apart.⁷⁰ Several phrases in his monody, as well as in that of Pepagomenos, suggest that they were familiar with Theodoros' poem to Cleofe in which he wrote of his desire for her body, and of their one flesh torn in two. Pepagomenos, a considerably older, married man and a doctor, had obliquely acknowledged that desire:⁷¹

Οἱ μὲν γὰρ τῶν σωμάτων ἔροτες, ἐπειδὴ ῥεόντων εἰσὶν, οὐ πάντως τὴν διαμονὴν ἔχουσιν, αἱ δὲ κατὰ Θεὸν ζώντες τε καὶ πολιτευόμενοι ἀληχτόν τινα καὶ ἀμυγῇ τῶν ἐντευθεν δυσχερῶν τὸν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαβεβαιούμενου πόθον κούφῳ τῷ τῆς ἀρετῆς πτερῷ πρὸς τὴν ὄντως καὶ θείαν ἀνάγονται πολιτείαν ... Τοιγάρτοι ἔχει μὲν ἡ τῆς κατὰ σάρκα συναφείας διάζευξις τὴν τῆς τομῆς τῶν μερῶν ἀφόρετον ἀλγηδόνα.

[*Loves that are of the body*, when the body fails, do not entirely have permanence, but those who live and are governed by God's love, confirming *their unceasing and unmixed desire* towards one another in the face of present discomforts, are raised up on the light wings of virtue towards the true and holy state ...]

He then spoke of Theodoros' anguish as if from his own personal experience, 'the cleaving apart of a bodily union brings the unbearable pain of an amputation'.⁷²

It is this image of bodily union that Theodoros used to begin his poem to Cleofe, a union terribly split apart. Images in the poem (see Appendix) suggest that he had gone for comfort to a poem Cleofe's father had written at the death of his own wife and had then used it as the model for his own. Theodoros imagined five possible forms of union in an attempt to express his desire for the lost physical union of their bodies, moving from sexual union in life, to the possibility of a spiritual marriage, to a union within a painting, to the union of their bones in the tomb, and finally to rest in a Dantean union of joy in the presence of God.

Conclusion

Cleofe's body is still being observed. In 1955, during archaeological work in Hagia Sophia, the palace chapel at Mistra, archaeologist N. Dandrakis found a tomb in the south-east chapel in which there were remains of several bodies. The lowest body, of which the sternum, a twist of hair, a few teeth, slippers, and fragments of fabric remained, was identified as that of a young woman wearing western dress and slippers – and most probably Italian fabric – of the first half of the fifteenth century, and hair lacings of the kind which appear in coiffures shown in art of the period from her sister Paola's court.⁷³

The burial has been discussed a number of times, with scholars always tiptoeing around Cleofe, always hinting, but never saying outright that the remains are hers. However, one striking detail, left unmentioned in every discussion of the burial, beyond the list in the formal presentation on the finds, is the laurel leaves found in the tomb. Cleofe's poet father had known Petrarch when young, and Cleofe had grown up reading the copy of the *Canzoniere* that Petrarch had himself written out and given her grandfather. The laurel leaves, the Petrarchian associations, in conjunction with Theodoros' address to Cleofe as 'fellow-poet' (σύνεργος) make this discovery of a young woman's body deeply provocative.

Appendix

Theodoros II Palaiologos to Cleofe Malatesta

Although, my dearest, we were once united,
being one flesh, the word of God claims
that it is better now to be together in the spirit,
you, living in thought, looking down from Heaven
upon my life, my words, my ways, and thought,
seeing all clearly as it is your right,
I, alas, torn apart, living in pain,
calling out for you with scalding tears,
for me, one thing is left, one good thing, song.
And so, portraying you in this image,
I have put myself beside you in every sense
wishing to be united in a third form of union.
so as to quench the terrible fire of longing
and to empty out the agony from my soul.
But, you who have died but live with God, deservedly,
when in the same tomb necessity brings
my bones together with yours in the fourth way
then, showing me what lies beyond the five senses,
unite with me in the fifth and greater way
to share in delight and in the sight of God
my courage lies with you, who possess and indeed
give me, as my fellow-poet, this song.

Καὶ σώμασι πρίν, φιλτάτη, ξυνημμένοι
μία τε σὰρξ ὄντες, θεοῦ φάσκει λόγος,
τῷ πνεύματι ξύνειμεν ἄρτι κρειττόνως,
σοῦ μὲν νοητῶς καὶ τρόπον μοι καὶ λόγον
βίον τε καὶ νόημα πᾶν οὐρανόθεν
ἐμοῦ καθαρῶς καθορώσης ἢ θέμις,
ἐμοῦ διχασθέντος δέ, φεύ, ἐπωδύνως
θερμοῖς τε σὺν δακρυσιν ἐκκαλουμένου
μέρος τὸ λείπον καὶ καλὸν δὴ μοι μέλος.
Ταύτη γὰρ ἐν ταύτῃ σε γράψας εἰκόνι
πάντως ἐμαυτὸν προσπαρέγραψα τρόπον,
ἐνώσεως θέλων ξυνήρθαί σοι τρίτῳ
ὥς τοῦ πόθου σβέσαιμι τὴν δεινὴν φλόγα
ψυχῆς τ' ἐπαντλήσαιμι οἰδαῖνον πάθος.
Ἀλλ' ὦ θανούσα καὶ θεῷ ζῶσ' ἀζίως,
ἡνίκα τοῖς σοῖς τὸ χρεὼν ταύτῳ τάφῳ
ὅστ' ἀ συνάψῃ τὰμὰ τετράδι τρόπων
αἰσθήσεων ἔξω με δεῖξαν πεντάδος,
πέμπτον σύναψον κρειττον' ἄλλον δὴ τρόπον
τρυφῆς μετασχεῖν καὶ θεοῦ θεωρίας,
σὺν σοὶ τὸ θαρρεῖν ὥς ἔχουσα καὶ μάλα

δοῦσα ξυνεργὸς ἀμὸς οἶα καὶ μέλος.⁷⁴

1 The translations of the monodies for Cleofe were made by Pierre A. MacKay. Other translations are mine. I want to thank Voula Dunn for pushing me to look at material in which I thought I was not interested.

2 'et aliis omnibus que suam respiciant conscientiam manere et conservare permittere': Letter of Theodoros II Palaiologos to Pope Martin V, in S. Lampros, *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά* (Athens, 1921–23, repr. 1972) (hereafter *Pal.*), pp. 102–3, dated 29 May 1419. Cf. n. 29 below.

3 In two articles Dabrowska discusses the advantages the papacy hoped to gain for their dealings with the western emperor from the Montferrat and Malatesta marriages. The Byzantines hoped to gain papal financial and military assistance for Constantinople, which never materialised. M. Dabrowska, 'Sophia of Montferrat, or The History of One Face', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianensis*, 56 (1996): pp. 180–2, and M. Dabrowska, 'Vasilissa, ergo gaude', *Byzantinoslavica*, 63 (2005): pp. 217–19.

4 There is some indication that Cleofe and her brothers and sisters were taught classical Greek as part of their education. Both John and Sophia were great-great-grandchildren of Andronikos II Palaiologos, by different wives (which made them half-third cousins). The Montferrat family had maintained connections to Byzantium and used Greek names, but whether those connections included knowledge of Greek is not known: Dabrowska, 'Sophia of Montferrat', pp. 183, 193. The wedding motet composed for Cleofe by Guillaume Dufay calls her fluent in each language ('utraque lingua facunda') – although a praise song may not be the most reliable evidence. Both women had more than a year before leaving home in which they might have learned some Greek, and then were in residence in Mistra and Constantinople for several months before their weddings, which would have allowed more time for language lessons.

5 Pseudo-Sphrantzes in George Sphrantzes, *Memorii, 1401–147. In anexăPseudo-Phrantzes (Macarie Melissenos) Cronica 1258–1481*, (ed.) Vasile Grecu (Bucharest, 1966), p. 260: 'because of the emperor's desire for other women' (διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶσθαι τὸν βασιλεῖα ἑτέραις γυναιξίν). M. Philippides (trans.), *Emperors, Patriarchs and Sultans of Constantinople: An Anonymous Greek Chronicle of the Sixteenth Century* (Brookline, MA, 1990), 28: 'The emperor was extremely addicted to the pleasure of the flesh and, for this reason, he had no affection for her' ('Ἦν γὰρ ὁ βασιλεὺς πόρνος λίαν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἠγάπα αὐτήν) Laonikos Chalcocondyles, (ed.) E. Darkó, *Laionici Chalcocondylae Historiarum Demonstrationes* (Budapest, 1922), 2.6: 'For the emperor of Byzantium (John) was in Proikonesos lingering with his lover, who was the daughter of a priest' (Βασιλεὺς δὲ αὐτὸς Βυζαντίου ἐν Προικονήσῳ γενόμενος ἐσχόλαζέ τε περὶ γυναικὸς ἔρωτα, ἥς ἔρων ἐτύγχανεν, ἦν γὰρ ἱερέως θυγάτηρ).

6 A. Angelou (ed.), *Manuel Palaiologos: Dialogue with the Empress-Mother on Marriage* (Vienna, 1991), *passim*, especially pp. 95, 99. Manuel II worked on this treatise, widely circulated in the palace and among the *literati*, from 1417 until his death 1425. His sons could read that the best reason their father could produce for marriage was its benevolent influence on the lower classes. Manuel did grant the possibility of companionship, and an heir to the throne, as well as prayer for one's soul after death offered by the surviving spouse and children. That Manuel considered marriage a problem is worth remembering in the context of his sons' marriages.

7 H. Magoulas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, by Doukas (Detroit, 1975) 20.5. Doukas was secretary to the *podestà* of Galata, and would have been in a position to learn about events in Constantinople.

8 V. Grecu, *Ducas: Istoria Turco-Bizantină* (Bucharest, 1952), 20.6 (hereafter, Doukas.) From this passage, S. Ronchey, *L'enigma di Piero: L'ultimo bizantino e la*

crociata fantasma nella rivelazione di un grande quadro (Milan, 2006), p. 43, makes the claim that Sophia was a giantess with the face of a gorgon ('una gigantessa dalla faccia di gorgone').

⁹ Chalcocondyles 1, p. 192.

¹⁰ Similarly, when Chalcocondyles comes to tell the story of Theodoros and Cleofe, he puts the responsibility on Theodoros. Because he lived at Mistra, although after the period under discussion, he may well have heard reports by some who had observed the marriage.

¹¹ George Sphrantzes, *Memorii, 1401–1477*, 6, 2.

¹² Pseudo-Sphrantzes, p. 260.

¹³ J. Herrin, 'Toleration and Repression, within the Byzantine Family: Gender Problems', in K. Nikolaou (ed.), *Toleration and Oppression in the Middle Ages / Ανοχή και Κατάστρολη στους Μέσους Χρόνους*, National Hellenic Research Institute for Byzantine Research International Symposium 10 (Athens, 2002), p. 178, n. 19, mentions Psellos' much earlier account of Eudokia, daughter of Constantine VIII, who asked to be allowed to enter a convent rather than marry: she had earlier suffered smallpox.

¹⁴ G. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature* (Syracuse NY, 1986), p. 15; M. Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Broken Vows and Cloistered Lives in the Renaissance Convent* (New York, 2003), p. 23, *et passim*. There were exceptions, however: for example, Paola, sister of Cleofe Malatesta, had a spinal deformity, as did her brother, Pandolfo, archbishop of Patras. At the age of 13 or 14 she was married to Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, Lord of Mantua, with whom she had a long and reasonably happy marriage, several children, and a reputation as 'the most beautiful woman in Italy', A. Falcioni (ed.), *Le Donne di casa Malatesti* (Rimini, 2005), p. 943.

¹⁵ A.-M. Talbot, 'Building Activity in Constantinople under Andronikos II: The Role of Women Patrons in the Construction and Restoration of Monasteries', in N. Necipoğlu (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople: Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life* (Leiden; Boston; Cologne, 2001), p. 330. The territory of Montferrat covered a large and wealthy area of north-western Italy, while that of Pesaro was very small. In 1423, seven years after Cleofe's sister Taddea was married, their father had still not been able to pay the dowry promised for that marriage. Letter 52, in E. Angiolini and A. Falcioni (eds), *La Signoria di Malatesta 'Dei Sonetti' Malatesti (1391–1429)* (Rimini, 2002), p. 166.

¹⁶ J. Verpeaux, *Pseudo-Kodinos: Traité des Offices* (Paris, 1966), p. 12.

¹⁷ We have no specific information as to the reception of either bride. M. Jeffreys, 'The Vernacular ειοιτήριοι for Agnes of France', *Byzantine Papers: Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference* (Canberra, 1981), pp. 101–15, discusses several earlier receptions of foreign brides.

¹⁸ The procession, according to Pseudo-Kodinos, should have been led off by the cheetah-handlers with their cheetahs sitting behind them on their horses: ἰστέον δὲ καὶ τοῦτο, ὡς οἱ παρδοβάγιοι, ὀπνηνικά φέρουσι τοὺς πάρδους, ἱππόται ὁμοίως ἐξέρχονται. This can be seen at the beginning of the procession of the Magi by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Medici Chapel in Florence. There is no evidence that the last Palaiologoi kept cheetahs. Cyriaco of Ancona 15 years later seems to suggest that they had been released into the wild: E. Bodnar, *Cyriac of Ancona: Later Travels* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), pp. 54–5.

¹⁹ Magoulias, *Decline and Fall*, p. 113. Doukas, 20. 6: Ἰδὼν οὖν ὁ Βασιλεὺς ἡβουλήθη πέμψαι ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς δομοῖς καὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, τοῦ βασιλέως Μανουὴλ, στοργὴν ἐκωλύετο.

²⁰ M. Letts, *Pero Tafur: Travels and Adventures (1435–1439)*, (New York, 1926),

ch. 17 from <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/tafur.html#ch17>. It is probable that John had his own residence. Pseudo-Kodinos, 8. 11. 18–19 refers to the son of the emperor returning to his own residence (ὁ δὲ γε δεσπότης εἰς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ὄσιπτον), and this is also likely if John entertained other women.

²¹ C.C. Bambach, 'Byzantium and the Renaissance', in H. Evans (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power, 1261–1557* (New Haven, 2004), p. 527: of John: 'of pale face, the beard black, hair and eyebrows likewise, eyes grey tending to green and sloping shoulders, small in person' ('de la facia palida la barpa negra chapelj e cilglij el simile hochi grizy e tra in verde e chine le spale picholo di persona'). Both descriptions of concern for image occur in accounts of John's stay in Italy. See text from K. Setton, 'The Emperor John VIII Slept Here.', *Speculum*, 33.2 (1958): pp. 222–8, at 227. V. Laurent, (ed.) *Les 'Mémoires' du grand Ecclésiarque de l'Eglise de Constantinople, Sylvestre Syropoulos, sur le concile de Florence (1438–1439)* (Rome, 1971), p. 25.

²² This gave rise to a lawsuit, as the captain had claimed damage to the ship prevented him from transporting goods, but the merchants discovered that the damage had not prevented him from transporting the empress to Chios: private correspondence with Daniel Duran i Duelt, on 12 February 2009. See his forthcoming article, D. Duran i Duelt, 'Bernat Fuster va participar en la marxa de Constantinoble de l'emperadriu Sofia de Monferrato (1426)? A propòsit d'un document malloquí', *Maria Teresa Ferrer i Malloi* (forthcoming).

²³ Sophia joined a Dominican convent at Trino and died in 1437, aged about 43. I have not been able to determine whether this was the Dominican convent founded by her step-mother, Margaret of Savoy. Dabrowska, 'Sophia of Montferrat', p. 190.

²⁴ Perhaps significantly, this woman, in an Arthurian fresco, is identified iconographically as the daughter of King Brangoire and the mother of Helain who was to become king of Constantinople. J. Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescos* (Princeton, 1986), p. 31. Cleofe's daughter was Helena. Pisanello painted this woman at least three times: in this fresco, in the Verona fresco of the princess of Trebizond, and in a fresco fragment at the Palazzo Venezia in Rome.

²⁵ Chalcocondyles, 1, p. 193.

²⁶ I have posted the primary sources with complete bibliography online at: <http://nauplion.net/Mistra.html> (last accessed 23 February 2012).

²⁷ A. Falcioni, 'Cleofe Malatesti nelle fonti epistolari Mantovane', in Falcioni (ed.), *Le Donne*, p. 3: 'abia promesso habitare con lei sei anni et non più, et vive in osservantia de sua castità et astenentia, non magiando mai carne'.

²⁸ The Mistra court doctor, Demetrios Pepagomenos, had written a treatise on gout at the request of Manuel II: *Liber de Podagra, Graece et Latine*, (ed.) J. Bernard (Leiden, 1743). Pepagomenos advised against meat and sexual excess, but as he was a married man with two sons, Theodoros had a reasonable example of non-excessive sexual activity. According to Garland, Pepagomenos had been in the suite of Manuel II when he visited the Morea in 1415, and remained at Mistra as court doctor. L. Garland, 'Mazaris's Journey to Hades: Further Reflections and Reappraisal', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 61 (2007): pp. 183–214, at 213, n. 68. At the age of 10, Theodoros had watched his uncle, Theodoros I, die slowly and painfully from gout; gout occurred with some frequency in the Palaiologoi. Whatever the reason, the specific term of six years seems inexplicable.

²⁹ E. Welch, 'The Art of Expenditure: The Court of Paola Malatesta Gonzaga in Fifteenth-Century Mantua', *Renaissance Studies*, 16.3 (2002): pp. 306–17, at 315. The cheese was apparently a hard cheese like parmesan.

30 A year and a half before the wedding, Theodoros had sent Martin V an *argyrobull* stating that Cleofe would be allowed to keep her religion, her chaplain and her customs, both spiritual and temporal: George Gemistos, *Pal.*, pp. 102–3, dated 29 May 1419. Cf. n. 1 above.

31 M. Martiniani-Reber, 'Identification des tissus archéologiques de Mistra: origine et datation', in M. Martiniani-Reber (ed.), *Parure d'une princess byzantine / το ένδυμα μιας βυζαντινής πριγκίπισσας* (Geneva, 2000), p. 87.

32 Falcioni, 'Cleofe', 3, for 12 February 1427: 'Habito non fa monaco, benché io sia stata unta con un poco d'olio, sia certo ch'eo son con lo core così franca como eo fu mai.' <http://nauplion.net/CL-letters.pdf> (accessed 12.2.12).

33 George Gemistos, *Pal.* 4, p. 167: Σωφροσύνης δ' ἐκείνο μέγα τεκμήριον, ἡ ἐκ τῆς ἰταλικῆς ἀνέσεώς τε καὶ ῥαστώνης ἐπὶ τὸ κατεσταλμένον τε καὶ κόσμιον τοῦ ἡμετέρου τρόπου μεταβολὴ ἀκριβεστάτη, ὡς μὴδ' ἂν μιὰ τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν γυναικῶν ὑπερβολὴν λιπεῖν, and similarly, a few lines below, Εὐσεβείας δὲ ἀπόδειξις ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ λατρεία, ἣν προσευχαῖς τε καὶ αἰσιταίαις ἐνδελεχέσι τὸν ἡμέτερον νόμον ἐπεδείκνυτο.

34 Cheilas, *Pal.* 4, pp. 146 l. 28–147 l. 1: Ἐνθεν τοι καὶ γαστρός ἀλογόουσα καὶ τὸν ὕβριστήν, ὡς εἰπεῖν. διηνεκῶς προσκειμένη ὀρθοστάτην ἄννος. οὐ κάμπτουσα γόνυ.

35 It may be significant that Cleofe died in mid-April. Easter that year was on 12 April, preceded in the eastern rite by 40 days of extreme fasting. Assuming she observed the fast, she approached childbirth in a condition of near-anaemia. Both Pepagomenos and Bessarion use the term κατακλυσμός, by which the hearer would understand that they had been struck by a collective cataclysm, and that she died from a massive haemorrhage – which might be expected in anaemia. Other oblique remarks in Pepagomenos indicate a premature birth, probably of a son. While we have only these statements of Gemistos and Cheilas on her fasting, the women of Cleofe's immediate family were known for their religious devotion and austere observances; for example, Battista: see Falcioni, *Le Donne*, p. 845; Paola: *ibid.*, p. 953, and Welch, 'The Art of Expenditure', pp. 315–16.

36 Bartolomea Acciacuoli, wife of Theodoros I (d.c.1397), was a Florentine. Nothing is known of her at Mistra.

37 In his monody, Pepagomenos commented warmly on Cleofe's improvement of the situation of court women. 'The orphaned children of her household mourn her, who acted as a mother to all, sharing out to each of them what was right, and neglecting nothing of their care; she made it possible for the women to live together with husbands and men with wives, to practise their lives openly in a different manner, a matter that had in many periods over the years been neglected, but was rightly and properly fostered during the reign of our most holy queen, with all the attention and concern that one might describe' ('Θρηνοῦσι δ' ὡς κοινὴν τινα μητέρα τὰ τῶν οἰκείων ἀπορφανισθέντα τέκνα, ἐκάστοις τὸ κατ' ἀξίαν ὥσπερ ἀποδιδούσα καὶ μὴδὲν τι τῆς προνοίας ἐλλείπουσα, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν συνοικεῖν ἀνδράσι, τὰ δ' αὖ γυναιξὶ καὶ οἷον πρὸς φῶς ἄγειν καὶ δημιουργεῖν τρόπον ἕτερον, πρᾶγμα ἐν πολλοῖς ἐτῶν περιόδοις ἀμεληθέν, δικαίως δ' αὖ γε καὶ προσηκόντως ἐπὶ τῇ τῆς θειοτάτης δεσποίνης ἡμῶν βασιλείᾳ αὐξηθὲν τε καὶ τιμηθὲν, μεθ' ὅσης ἂν εἴποι τῆς προθυμίας καὶ σπουδῆς') Pepagomenos, 6.

38 Pepagomenos, 3: Τί γάρ, οὐκ ἂν τις τῶν τῆς κεμένης ἐν τε σμίκροτάτῳ χώρῳ συνεχομένης δικαίως ὀδύραιτο, πότερον τὴν ἡλικίαν, ἐν ἣ τοσαύτην εἶχε τὴν χάριν καὶ ἣν ἔχουσα οἴχεται, ἢ τὴν ὥραν, ἢ ὡς ἐχρῆν μᾶλλον.

39 G. Schmalzbauer-Bochum, 'Eine bisher unedierte Monodie auf Kleope Palaiologina von Demetrios Pepagomenos', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 10 (1971): pp. 224–9, at 227, 5.

40 A fire in the palace of Pesaro in the late fifteenth-century destroyed the palace archives and, one can only assume – considering the more than 5,000 family letters that survive in Modena from the period – there would have been many more letters from Cleofe.

41 Falcioni, ‘Cleofe’, 1 for 5 October 1426.

42 N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir l’histoire des croisades au XV^e siècle*, vol. 2 (Bucharest, 1915), p. 197 and <http://nauplion.net/CL-Battista.pdf>. ‘Eya ergo, sanctissime pater, consurge in defensionem constantissime filie, que tibi sanguine et spiritu conjuncta est, eoque vigilaneius quo nunc acrius impugnata[m] agnoveris, a bello utique domestico et intestine pugna.’ The letters’ use of similar phrases suggests that the women had somewhat discussed how to write: Paola’s letter of 22 January says that Cleofe felt herself abandoned by him’ (‘se sentisse abandonada da lui’), while Battista says that Cleofe felt herself abandoned in the midst of the waves (‘in mediis fluctibus derelicta se senserit’.) Despite the similarity of the letters, Battista’s letter is conventionally dated to 1425 and that date is unquestioningly repeated from author to author. January 1427 seems to me a much more likely date for Battista’s letter, which must have written at the same time as Paola’s. The reference to ‘intestine war’ (‘intestine pugna’) is highly revealing: Cleofe was a Malatesta, and from a cluster of highly educated women who were anything but passive.

43 D. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat Grece de Morée*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1932), pp. 299–301.

44 Falcioni, ‘Cleofe’, p. 3, for 12 February 1427. Writing of another conversion, Battista quotes a mutual acquaintance, Christofano, who, in describing a conversation with Cleofe, said she was the most perfidious Greek woman in the world (‘ella è più perfida greca del mondo’). In this letter, Battista also says that Theodoros seems to have no suspicion of Cleofe and she can talk to men freely.

45 ‘Faxite pregare a Dio per l’anima mia, che del corpo non me ne incuro.’ Falcioni, ‘Cleofe’, p. 4, for 26 January 1428. <http://nauplion.net/CL-letters.pdf>.

46 ‘le lagreme non me lassa. ma de tutto non seria carta che la tenesse.’ Falcioni, ‘Cleofe’, p. 5, for 20 March 1428.

47 ‘questa qui parturie’: *ibid*.

48 Cleofe’s daughter was named, according to the Greek system of naming children, for Theodoros’ mother, Helena. A new Helen of Sparta must have provoked a number of literary efforts at Mistra.

49 One reader of this chapter offered the interpretation that Theodoros may have been thinking about leaving the marriage. We have several contemporary reports of his having such considerations – of joining a military order, of becoming a monk – from 1423, 1428, and 1429, in each of which there were crisis events, but none for this period. V. Grecu (ed.), *Memorii, 1401–1477* (Bucharest, 1966), 15.1, 16.4; E. Darkó (ed.), *Laionici Chalcocandylae Historiarum Demonstrationes* (Budapest, 1922), 1.193.

50 No evidence allows us to think that Cleofe was also considering a monastic life. Pepagomenos, 4, refers to this discretely: ‘disregarding paternal pride, cancelling maternal agreements, the petitioning of your sisters, and the native innovations in religion of your homeland, you were pliant in everything to your husband and lord, putting this before all else, *to follow his beliefs* through your life and to practise them as fully as you were able’ (‘καὶ παριδοῦσα μὲν εὐθὺς πατρικὴν στοργήν, συνθήκας δ’ ἀθετήσασα μητρικὰς ἀδελφῶν τε ἀξιώσεις, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν πάτριον καινοτομίαν τῆς πίστεως, δι’ ἀπάντων ὑπείχουσα ἦσθα τῷ ἀνδρὶ καὶ δεσπότῃ, τοῦτο πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων τιθεῖσα, τὸ τὰ τοῦτω γε δοκοῦντα βούλεσθαι τε διὰ βίου καὶ ποιεῖν ὅση δύναμις).

⁵¹ Falcioni, 'Cleofe', 3, for 12 February 1427. Cf. S. Origone, 'Marriage Connections between Byzantium and the West in the Age of the Palaiologoi', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 10/1 (1995): pp. 226–41, at 231, speaks of Cleofe's conversion 'reportedly on her own initiative' – Origone uses no original sources. S. Runciman, 'The Marriages of the Sons of the Emperor Manuel II', in *Miscellanea Agostino Pertusi*, vol. 1 (Bologna, 1981), pp. 273–82, states at 279: 'Cleofe willingly embraced Orthodoxy.' Runciman uses the men's orations as his source, and has not seen the women's letters.

⁵² Pepagomenos did make one reference to 'the native innovations in religion of your homeland' (ἐτι δὲ καὶ τὴν πατριὸν καινοτομίαν τῆς πίστεως) (Pepagomenos, 4). One could also speculate that some of her intense religiosity, such as the standing during the night in prayer, might in part be a penance for the 'conversion.'

⁵³ This poem is included in an Appendix to this chapter.

⁵⁴ Pepagomenos, 4.

⁵⁵ Cheilas, *Pal.* 4, p. 146 ll. 20–26; p. 147 ll. 9–11.

⁵⁶ Herrin, 'Toleration and Repression', p. 183.

⁵⁷ Gemistos, *Pal.* 4, p. 164.

⁵⁸ Pepagomenos, 1.

⁵⁹ E. Thompson (ed.), *Chronicon Adae de Usk, A.D. 1377–1421* (London; Oxford, 1910), p. 97, l. 278.

⁶⁰ G. Cammelli, *Démétrius Cydonès, Correspondance* (Paris, 1930), Letter 5.5 and *passim*.

⁶¹ Cheilas, *Pal.* 4, p. 147 ll. 4–6. Pepagomenos, 6, paras 4–5. But *where* did a Malatesta learn to cook?

⁶² Pepagomenos, 8, para. 3.

⁶³ Gemistos, *Pal.* 4, pp. 165–6.

⁶⁴ Herrin, 'Toleration and Repression', p. 183, cites the *vita* of Kyrillos of Philea who married a woman 'beautiful in body, more beautiful in spirit'.

⁶⁵ Pepagomenos, 2.

⁶⁶ Pepagomenos, 3 and 8.

⁶⁷ Cheilas, *Pal.* 4, p. 146.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145 l. 18: Ἐκείνην Ἑσπερία γῆ μὲν ἀνήκε χρυσοῦ γένους ἀπορροήν.

⁶⁹ Cheilas, *Pal.* 4, p. 149 l. 17: πῶς ἴδη πεσῶν ὁ πολῦτιμος ὄδε λιθοξέρραγι.

⁷⁰ Bessarion, *Pal.* 4, p. 156 ll. 7–8: Τοῦ σώματος γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ τῆς μιᾶς ἦσθετο διαίρεθεις καὶ τοῦ ἐνὸς εἰς δύο τηθέντος.

⁷¹ Pepagomenos, 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ N. Dandrakis, 'Ἡ ταφή μιας βυζαντινῆς 'πριγκίπισσας': δεδομένα της ανασκαφῆς', in Martiniani-Reber, *Parure d'une princesse byzantine*, pp. 27–9; 87–90, 99–100. Also, Hellenic Ministry of Culture, *Byzantine Hours: Works and Days in Byzantium: The City of Mystras* (Athens, 2001), p. 148–53.

⁷⁴ *Pal.* 4, p. 176. This, and two other poems by Theodoros, are analysed in Diana Gilliland Wright and Pierre A. MacKay, 'Gold Hammerings: Three Funeral Poems by Theodoros II Palaiologos' (forthcoming). The translation of the poem is from that article. For the text of Cleofe's father's poem, see *Malatesta Malatesti: Rime*, (ed.) Domizia Trolli (Parma, 1982), p. 158, 26. Theodoros' poem also incorporates the central idea of the opening lines of the Theocritan idyll on Polyphemus and Galatea. MacKay's translation of the idyll can be found online at <http://nauplion.net/polyphemus-theocritus.htm>.

Chapter 9

Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course

Shaun Tougher

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that one of the defining cultural characteristics of Byzantine civilisation from the seventh to the fifteenth centuries is the wearing of beards by adult males. Comments such as ‘beards became a fixture in Byzantine fashion’ and ‘beards were a universally respected sign of maturity and power’ are representative of the general perception of the place and prevalence of beards in Byzantine society.¹ Perhaps it is because this is such an accepted truth that there has, ironically, been next to no focused exploration of beards in Byzantium. This is in marked contrast, for instance, with the increasing number of studies on hair (including beards) in western medieval Europe. Robert Bartlett’s 1994 ‘Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages’ has been followed, for example, by articles by Pauline Stafford, Bob Mills and Carl Phelpstead, the latter two both using psychoanalytical theory to analyse the cultural meaning of hair.² These all demonstrate that ‘Hair ... was entwined with questions about masculinity’, and indeed about gender in general.³ Thus there is scope for the subject of beards (and hair generally) to receive much closer scrutiny in Byzantine studies.⁴ In this chapter my aim is to initiate this process, deploying in particular a life course approach, itself not much applied to Byzantium.⁵ I will consider evidence for beards as a cultural signifier of Byzantium and ponder why from the seventh century beards became essential for adult male Byzantines. I will then turn to the subject of the Life Course, which I will explore especially in relation to Byzantine eunuchs, who were, of course, beardless. I will consider how their lack of a beard affected their life course and their gender status. Finally I will conclude that the bearding of Byzantium may be a consequence of the increasing prevalence of native eunuchs in Byzantine society.

Byzantium and Beards

As noted, it is commonly observed that from the seventh century onwards beards were de rigueur for Byzantine adult males. From evidence of coinage it appears that Phokas (602–10) was the first Byzantine emperor (since Julian) ‘with a really distinctive beard’.⁶ All adult emperors subsequent to him had beards. But the beard was not just a marker of the ruler. It is notable that in his treatise of 899 on court hierarchy Philotheos uses the group term ‘bearded’ to designate those officials who were male but not eunuchs.⁷ Byzantine dreambooks indicate the generally positive value that was attached to the beard. The *Oneirocriticon* of Daniel observed that shaving off one’s beard or having it fall out was bitter for anyone, while the *Oneirocriticon* of Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425) identified the beard as a symbol of family and friends and beardlessness as signifying the loss of both.⁸ To contemporary cultures also the beard was a key symbol of Byzantium. In his *History of the Normans* Amatus of Montecassino relates how the Lombard prince Gisulf II of Salerno pretended to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem but in reality went to Constantinople (probably in 1062) to visit the emperor to plot against the Norman duke Robert Guiscard; but on Gisulf’s return Robert was not deceived, marvelling that Gisulf ‘had a long beard as if he were from Constantinople’.⁹ (The Byzantines’ attachment to their beards, and the Latin custom of shaving, became the focus for significant comment in the discourse about cultural and religious differences between East and West, especially in relation to the tensions created by the Crusades and ecclesiastical divisions.)¹⁰ The tenth-century Arab historian and geographer Masudi associates beards with Byzantine emperors, though he asserts that it was Nicephorus I (802–11) who was the first not to shave.¹¹

Regarding Byzantium and beards it is important to appreciate that the beard was eschewed by emperors throughout the early period, from Constantine the Great (306–37) until the advent, it seems, of Phokas (barring the exception of Julian of course: see below). Indeed it was Constantine who re-established the iconography of the beardless emperor, ditching the clipped military beard of the tetrarchs and embracing the clean-shaven youthful image so associated with Augustus (and Alexander the Great), which was to become the standard portrait for early Byzantine emperors. Presumably this shift in style, described as ‘one of the most astonishing makeovers of the imperial image in Roman history’,¹² had the virtue of distinguishing Constantine from his tetrarchic rivals but also of laying claim to powerful early models of the ruler as heroic youth and as divine youth.¹³

In Greco-Roman antiquity the beard had had a varied history as a valued form of cultural expression. It had been the *sine qua non* for the

Greeks until Alexander the Great (336–23 BC) set the fashion for beardlessness, whilst for the Romans being clean-shaven was the norm until Hadrian (117–38) favoured the wearing of the beard.¹⁴ This is not to say that all followed these vogues rigorously.¹⁵ For instance, Greek philosophers after Alexander continued to value the beard as a symbol of traditional culture and a sign of the intellectual;¹⁶ Greeks living under the Roman empire could embrace the beard as a form of resistance; and Christians could value the beard on moral and religious grounds.¹⁷ Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 36.17) relates how the Borysthenians (Olbian, on the north coast of the Black Sea) continued to wear the long hair and beard of the ancient Greeks, rejecting the fashion for Roman beardlessness, thus showing opposition to the Roman empire.¹⁸ Clement of Alexandria has much to say about the beard in his *Paidogogos*,¹⁹ and clearly owes much to traditional philosophical views.²⁰ He engages strongly with the ideology of hairiness as masculine and smoothness as feminine.²¹ Men who make their bodies smooth are classed as effeminate, womanish. He observes ‘unless one were to see such a person naked, one would think he was a woman’.²² He declares ‘God planned that woman be smooth-skinned ... But man He adorned like the lion, with a beard, and gave him a hairy chest as proof of his manhood and a sign of his strength and primacy ...’;²³ and also:²⁴

Τοῦτο οὖν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τὸ σύνθημα, τὸ γένειον, δι’ οὗ καταφαίνεται ὁ ἀνὴρ, πρεσβύτερόν ἐστι τῆς Εὕας καὶ σύμβολον τῆς κρείττονος φύσεως· τούτῳ πρέπειν ἐδικαίωσε τὸ λάσιον ὁ θεός, καὶ διέσπειρεν παρὰ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τὰς τρίχας ...

[His beard is the badge of a man and shows him unmistakably to be a man. It is older than Eve and is the symbol of the stronger nature. By God’s decree, hairiness is one of man’s conspicuous qualities, and, at that, hairiness distributed over his whole body.]

He asserts that God has numbered all the hairs of the body, not just those of the head (Matt. 10.30), and that ‘it is a sacrilege to trifle with the symbol of manhood’.²⁵ Ultimately, for Clement, the beard is essential for man, and he justifies this not just on biblical grounds but by appealing also to the *Odyssey* and classical learning in general.²⁶

The beard, and the lack of it, is also a subject for discussion by the one early Byzantine emperor who did embrace facial hair, Julian (361–3), the last pagan emperor. Julian’s attachment to the beard is usually understood in terms of his self-identification as an intellectual, a philosopher. Julian was of course highly educated, and seems to have held the bearded philosopher emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–80) as one of his heroes. Julian did not adopt the clipped military beard of

his tetrarchic predecessors and forebears, but the full beard of the philosopher.²⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus describes it as ‘shaggy and trimmed so as to end in a point’ (*hirsuta barba in acutum desinente vestitus*).²⁸ It is clear that Julian’s hairiness was mocked by contemporaries, most famously during his stay in Antioch (362–3), for in retaliation Julian composed his *Beardhater* (*Misopogon*, also known as *Antiochikos*). In response to his largely Christian critics Julian, like Clement, exploits concepts about masculinity and femininity in his favour; Julian is masculine and virtuous, the Antiochenes are effeminate and morally corrupt. He writes:²⁹

Καίτοι καὶ τοῦτο ἔχειν ἔοικεν ὁ πώγων ὥσπερ τὰ ἄλλα λυπηρόν, οὐκ ἐπιτρέπων καθαρά λείους καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οἶμαι γλυκερωτέρα χεῖλεσι χεῖλη προσμάττειν, ὅπερ ἤδη τις ἔφη τῶν ἐργασαμένων ζῆν τῷ Πανὶ καὶ τῇ Καλλιόπῃ εἰς τὸν Δάφνιν ποιήματα. Ὑμεῖς δὲ φατε δεῖν καὶ σχοινία πλέκειν ἐνθὲνδε καὶ ἔτοιμος παρέχειν, ἦν μόνον ἔλκειν δυνηθῆτε καὶ μὴ τὰς ἀτρίπτους ὑμῶν καὶ μαλακὰς χεῖρας ἢ τραχύτης αὐτῶν δεῖν ἄ ἐργάσῃται. Νομίσῃ δὲ μηδεὶς δυσχεραίνειν ἐμὲ τῷ σκώμματι. Δίδωμι γὰρ αὐτὸς τὴν αἰτίαν ὥσπερ οἱ τράγοι τὸ γένειον ἔχων, ἐξὸν οἶμαι λείον αὐτὸ ποιεῖν καὶ ψιλόν, ὅποιον οἱ καλοὶ τῶν παίδων ἔχουσιν ἅπασαι τε αἱ γυναῖκες, αἷς φύσει πρόσσεσι τὸ ἐράσμιον. Ὑμεῖς δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ γῆρα ζηλοῦντες τοὺς ὑμῶν αὐτῶν υἱέας καὶ τὰς θυγατέρας ὑπὸ ἀβρότητας βίου καὶ ἴσως ἀπαλότῃτος τρόπον λείον ἐπιμελῶς ἐργάζεσθε, τὸν ἄνδρα ὑποφαίνοντες καὶ παραδεικνύντες διὰ τοῦ μετώπου καὶ οὐχ ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῶν γνάθων.

[And yet for this as for other purposes a beard is evidently troublesome, since it does not allow one to press shaven ‘lips to other lips more sweetly’ – because they are smooth, I suppose – as has been said already by one of those who with the aid of Pan and Calliope composed poems in honour of Daphnis [Theocritus]. But you say that I ought to twist ropes from it! Well I am willing to provide you with ropes if only you have the strength to pull them and their roughness does not do dreadful damage to your ‘unworn and tender hands.’ And let no one suppose that I am offended by your satire. For I myself furnish you with an excuse for it by wearing my chin as goats do, when I might, I suppose, make it smooth and bare as handsome youths wear theirs, and all women, who are endowed by nature with loveliness. But you, since even in your old age you emulate your own sons and daughters by your soft and delicate way of living, or perhaps by your effeminate dispositions, carefully make your chins smooth, and your manhood you barely reveal and slightly indicate by your foreheads, not by your jaws as I do.]

Julian also confesses ‘my breast is shaggy, and covered with hair, like the breasts of lions who among wild beasts are monarchs like me, and I have never in my life made it smooth ... nor have I made any other part of my body smooth or soft’,³⁰ thus echoing Clement’s appeal to the example of the lion.³¹

The significance of Julian’s *Beardhater* for the history of the beard has been emphasised by Giles Constable, who observes that: ‘Burchard

of Bellevaux's (twelfth-century) *Apologia de barbis* ... is the only known work devoted to beards published between the *Misopogon* of Julian ... and J.P. Valerian's *Pro sacerdotum barbis* in 1531'.³² Constable notes that: 'A few works on hair and beards were written in Late Antiquity, in particular the *Encomium of Hair* by Dio Chrysostom and the *Encomium of Baldness*, written in reply, by Synesius of Cyrene', but opines that 'These were essentially rhetorical works, written to instruct and amuse, and were less serious and celebrated than the *Misopogon*'.³³ However, it is worth commenting briefly on the work of Synesius.³⁴ His praise of baldness was written (probably in 396 or 397, but no later than 405/6),³⁵ in response to the praise of hair ascribed to Dio, and which is in fact preserved in Synesius' work. Synesius was motivated to respond to Dio's work for a personal reason – he was himself bald. He indicates that hair was generally thought to contribute to the beauty of men so its loss was considered a misfortune, however, Synesius declares that he adjusted to his loss, then decided to challenge Dio.

Key arguments that he makes are that hairlessness denotes both wisdom and divinity.³⁶ In addition he remarks that hair is dead matter, and that it is an external thing valued by the ignorant; that baldness is associated with healthiness; and that Homer does not necessarily support Dio's argument. Especially relevant in relation to this chapter is that Synesius also addresses the issue of gender. He observes that it is women who are agreed by all everywhere to be the sex preoccupied with hair, and that they do not adopt baldness as a style or go bald by nature.³⁷ Thus baldness becomes a sign of masculinity, for it is the lot of men by nature to lose their hair. Synesius could have augmented his case here by including eunuchs, since they did not go bald either and this was understood to be because they were males who had become feminised. He does, however, utilise adulterers and effeminates (among whom he includes the emasculated devotees of Cybele) to help his case as such men were renowned for taking excessive care of their hair. Warfare also serves the subject of hair and masculinity. He argues, for instance, that the helmet is an image of baldness. Here he also comes to the question of beards, digressing on the decision of Alexander the Great to shave his troops following Persian exploitation of the Macedonians' beards to defeat them, by grabbing them by the beard and bringing them close in order to kill them.³⁸ The subsequent success of the Macedonians lay in their lack of facial hair. Thus Synesius can cleverly turn received wisdom on its head but is clearly indebted to it too, especially with regard to the dim view taken of those who show excessive concern for personal appearance.

Returning to the main focus of the first part of this chapter, an

obvious question to ask about Byzantium is why did beards become the cultural norm from the seventh century onwards? It is a question that has not been sufficiently addressed. Head has offered the answer of fashion, though one set by Heraclius rather than Phokas.³⁹ But even if it is ‘just fashion’ there must be an explanation for it. From the above discussion some possibilities can be suggested for the Byzantine beard: it is a sign of the increasing Hellenisation of the empire; it is a sign of the increasing Christianisation of the empire;⁴⁰ it is a sign of a desire to enhance masculinity, perhaps in response to a sense of political and military crisis.

Life Course

I turn now to the other focus of my chapter, the life course. This has been defined by Mary Harlow and Ray Laurence as ‘the temporal dimension to life that begins at birth and ends in death with numerous stages and rites of passage along the way’.⁴¹ It is well known that the growth of the first beard, as well as clipping of head hair, were key stages in the transition from youth to adulthood in the classical world.⁴² Youth was ‘associated with an inability to grow a beard ... Once a beard had grown the youth became a man’ (though ‘youth’ could form an extended period of time). The transitional weight of the growth of the beard for the male is equated with that of marriage for the female. In the Roman world the cutting of the first beard was ritualised, and could be performed as part of the festival of Iuvenalia, marked by sacrifice and the dedication of the hair to a deity.⁴³ Clement of Alexandria points to the life course significance of the growth of hair for males by asserting ‘[God] places such importance on these growths of hair [of the beard and chest] that he causes them to come to maturity in a man at the same time as his intelligence’.⁴⁴ Harlow and Laurence point to the significance of Suetonius reporting that Nero (AD 54–68) shaved his beard in the same year that he had his mother killed: the life course provides ‘an explanatory framework that stylised the actions of individuals’.⁴⁵ Even if Romans kept their facial hair in check after the dedication of the first beard they had passed through the transition point from youth to adult, and possessed the capability of growing a beard.

In the medieval period hair remained a potent transitional symbol. Bartlett notes that in early medieval Europe the first cutting of a boy’s hair formed a rite of passage, ‘as a mark of his transition to the age group beyond infants and the very young’, and observes that ‘the Church very soon recognised it with liturgical forms “for the first hair cut”’.⁴⁶ It is evident that Byzantium also enjoyed such rites. The *Book*

of *Ceremonies* describes the ritual for clipping the hair of an imperial child and distributing it to the child's sponsors, creating ties of spiritual or artificial kinship between the boy and these men, illustrating this with the specific case of the clipping of the hair of Leo VI during the reign of his father Basil I (867–86).⁴⁷ A similar event is met in the *Liber Pontificalis*, which records that Constantine IV (668–85) sent locks of the hair of his sons Justinian and Heraclius to the newly appointed pope Benedict II (684–5) and the clergy and army of Rome.⁴⁸ Since Benedict became pope in 684 it can be deduced that the older boy, Justinian, was about 16 at this time.

Byzantine conceptions of the life course are also suggested by monastic regulations about who can and cannot enter monasteries. It is well known that women were to be excluded from male monasteries, but there are also proscriptions against children and beardless youths.⁴⁹ These proscriptions are often understood as reflecting concerns about sexual temptation for the adult male monks, especially as eunuchs are also mentioned in conjunction with the troubling children and beardless youths, but perhaps it also reflects something about the appropriate life course stage at which one was suitable for the monastic life: adult male and mentally mature (signified by possession of a beard).⁵⁰

These monastic proscriptions appositely raise the subject of eunuchs, which I want to concentrate on for the rest of the chapter. It has been seen that in Byzantium, as in antiquity, the growing of a beard was a vital aspect of becoming an adult male. But where does this leave eunuchs? One of the most remarked physical features of eunuchs, next to their high voices, is their beardlessness. In the context of a life course approach does this mean that eunuchs were never able to enter adulthood, that they were stuck for eternity in youth, a dangerous liminal state? In addition to not being able to grow beards eunuchs were not allowed to marry, which surely intensified their unusual status. Could it be that characterisations of eunuchs in Byzantine writing were affected by the perception of these beings as eternal youths: volatile and immature?⁵¹ Eunuchs could be understood as feminised males, but should they in fact be read as permanent youths? If this is the case, if they were not considered adult males, how then can one understand the regular filling of ecclesiastical, monastic, political and military office by eunuchs in Byzantium?

In Procopius' narrative of the careers of sixth-century eunuchs with prominent political and military careers there certainly appears to be reflected some anxiety about these eunuchs, which occasions special pleading. In relation to Narses, the most famous eunuch general – vanquisher of the Ostrogoths and governor of Italy – Procopius reports various theories as to why Justinian put the eunuch in charge of the

campaign in Italy, including one relayed to him by a senator in Rome.⁵² This senator reported that once when cattle were being driven through the Forum of Peace a steer left the herd and mounted a fountain where there was a bronze statue of a bull, and stood over this bull. A Tuscan interpreted this as a sign that one day a eunuch would undo the ruler of Rome, which caused laughter at the time but was later marvelled at. The success of the eunuch general Solomon over the Moors in North Africa is also justified by recourse to prophecy; Procopius relates that after Solomon's great victory 'the Moors recalled the saying of their women, to the effect that their nation would be destroyed by a beardless man'.⁵³ Thus there is an underlying assumption that the success of these eunuchs needs to be explained, that it cannot simply be accepted.

Such ambivalence, however, did not prevent a string of eunuchs holding military commands in the Byzantine empire, from Solomon in the sixth century until Andronikos Eonopolites in the thirteenth century.⁵⁴ This suggests that the life course status of eunuchs was not seen as a major problem. Perhaps, though, Byzantine eunuchs had a different life course model to men and women: as is well known, eunuchs were regularly identified with angels in Byzantine thought.⁵⁵ Both were key agents of their masters (emperor/God) and both were beardless. Here the evidence of the dreambooks is once again illuminating. In the dreambook of Artemidorus, from the second century AD, eunuchs are understood as untrustworthy, as they are part of a group of men who 'indicate false expectations, since they cannot be numbered either among men or among women due to their physical condition'.⁵⁶ Yet in Byzantine dreambooks eunuchs were imbued with positive connotations. The dreambook of Nicephorus declares that seeing a eunuch is altogether auspicious, and brings about a good result.⁵⁷ The dreambook of Achmet provides a key for this, as it says that in dreams eunuchs signify angels (and vice versa) because eunuchs are pure, angel-like and insusceptible to lust.⁵⁸ It also declares that angels are indicators of good news, victory, happiness, health and wealth; foretell the birth of a male child (as Gabriel announced the birth of Jesus to Mary); and tell the truth. These positive associations of angels presumably explain why eunuchs themselves came to be understood as a positive sign in dreambooks. Particularly striking is the association with military success, and perhaps this contributes to the explanations for the number of eunuch generals found in Byzantium.⁵⁹ It should not be forgotten that the archangel Michael was the commander of the heavenly forces, and could be depicted as a warrior.⁶⁰ These reflections may support the thesis, particularly espoused by Kathryn Ringrose, that in Byzantium eunuchs were constructed positively as a third gender.⁶¹

There are indications, however, that things were not necessarily so straightforward. From Rome in the early imperial period we encounter a eunuch who nevertheless clipped and dedicated his hair. This is the case of the famous beauty Earinos ('Springy'), favourite of the emperor Domitian (81–96) and celebrated in poems by Martial and Statius. It is Statius in particular who relates the clipping and dedication of the hair, for he wrote a poem about it, at the request of the eunuch.⁶² The hair was despatched in a jewelled golden box, also containing a mirror, to the temple of Asclepius at Pergamum. Although Earinos was unable to grow a beard he did still engage in a rite of transition, 'a ritual that marks his move to manhood'.⁶³ Significantly, Martial depicts Ganymede as jealous of the altered state of Earinos, whom he designates as an ephebe.⁶⁴

There is also a case of old age catching up with a beautiful eunuch, in Claudian's depiction of Eutropius, the powerful grand chamberlain of Arcadius (395–408) at the end of the fourth century AD. Eutropius is cast off by his male lover when he begins to lose his youthful beauty. The eunuchs laments: 'When a woman grows old her children cement the marriage tie and a mother's dignity compensates for the lost charms of a wife ... Love perishes with my beauty; the roses of my cheeks are faded ... How can I, an old man, please?'⁶⁵ Instead of being a lover, Eutropius becomes a pander, and then a lady's maid. An horrific image of the eunuch in old age is presented.⁶⁶

*Iamque aevo laxata cutis, sulcisque genarum corruerat passa facies rugosior
uva: flava minus presso finduntur vomere rura, nec vento sic vela tremunt.
miserabile turpes exedere caput tineae; deserta patebant intervalla comae:
qualis sitientibus arvis arida ieiunae seges interlucet aristae vel qualis gelidis
pluma labente pruinis arboris inmoritur trunco brumalis hirundo ... cum
pallida nudis ossibus horrorem dominis praeberet imago decolor et macies
occursu laederet omnes, aut pueris latura metus aut taedia mensis aut crimen
famulis aut procedentibus omen ... tandem ceu funus acerbum infaustamque
suis trusere penatibus umbram.*

[And now his skin had grown loose with age; his face, more wrinkled than a raisin, had fallen in by reason of the lines in his cheeks. Less deep the furrows cloven in the cornfield by the plough, the folds wrought in sails by the wind. Loathsome grubs ate away his head and bare patches appeared amid his hair. It was as though clumps of dry barren corn dotted a sun-parched field, or as if a swallow were dying in winter sitting on a branch, moulting in the frosty weather ... When his pallor and fleshless bones had roused feelings of revulsion in his masters' hearts, and his foul complexion and lean body offended all who came in contact with him, scaring children, disgusting those that sat at meat, disgracing his fellow-slaves, or terrifying with an evil omen those that met him ... then at last they thrust him from their houses like a troublesome corpse or an ill-omened ghost.]

It is crystal clear that castration was not necessarily the key to eternal youth or angelic beauty.

Conclusion

To conclude, I offer one further thought. As noted above the beard became *de rigueur* in Byzantium in the seventh century. This happens also to be the period marked by the shift from the use of foreign slave eunuchs to the use of native Byzantines as eunuchs: the Roman empire had outlawed the castration of its own citizens but it is clear that the Byzantine empire could and did depend on a native supply to meet its demand for eunuchs.⁶⁷ Perhaps, then, as I have argued elsewhere, this cultural transformation caused another one, the adoption of the beard as normative for adult males, the beard becoming essential as a vital means of distinguishing non-eunuch adult native males from eunuch native males.⁶⁸ Eunuchs may not have been able to grow beards themselves but they may have caused non-eunuch men to want to grow beards in order to assert their masculinity.

1 C. Head, 'Physical Descriptions of the Emperors in Byzantine Historical Writing', *Byzantion*, 50 (1980): pp. 226–40, at 231; M. Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (Westport, CN, 2006), p. 47. See also 'Beard' in A.P. Kazhdan (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (3 vols, New York; Oxford, 1991), p. 274; and L. Bréhier, *La Civilisation byzantine* (Paris, 1950), pp. 46–7.

2 R. Bartlett, 'Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4 (1994): pp. 43–60; P. Stafford, 'The Meaning of Hair in the Anglo-Norman World: Masculinity, Reform, and National Identity', in M. van Dijk and R. Nip (eds), *Saints, Scholars, and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies* (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 153–71; R. Mills, 'The Signification of the Tonsure', in P.H. Cullum and K.J. Lewis (eds), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Cardiff, 2004), pp. 109–26; C. Phelpstead, 'Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland', *Scandinavian Studies* (2013): forthcoming. On issues of hair (in relation to Charlemagne specifically) see also P.E. Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004), pp. 3–42. On beards in the (mostly western) Middle Ages see G. Constable, 'Beards in the Middle Ages', in R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Apologiae duae: Gozechini Epistola ad Walcherium: Burchardi Ut videtur, abbatis Bellevallis Apologia de barbis* (Turnhout, 1985), pp. 47–130.

3 Stafford, 'The Meaning of Hair', p. 155.

4 For some recent discussion of the question of beards and masculinity in Byzantine material culture (exploring especially the illustrated manuscript the *Madrid Skylitzes*) see B.K. Bjørnholt and L. James, 'The Man in the Street: Some Problems of Gender and Identity in Byzantine Material Culture', in M. Grünbart, E. Kislinger, A. Muthesius, D. Ch. Stathakopoulos (eds), *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400–1453)* (Vienna, 2007), pp. 51–6, esp. 53–5. They assert that the manuscript depicts eunuchs bearded and suggest that this is to denote masculinity.

5 Cf. Eve Davies' work on the social construction of life stages in Byzantium: Eve Davies, *From womb to the tomb: The Byzantine life course AD 518-1204* PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2012.

6 Head, 'Physical Descriptions', p. 230. Note, however, the comments in the 'friendly supplement' to Head's paper by B. Baldwin, 'Physical Descriptions of Byzantine Emperors', *Byzantion*, 51 (1981): pp. 8–21, esp. 18–19. The seventh-century emperor Constantine IV (668–85) became known as 'Pogonatus' ('the bearded'), but it seems that he has been confused with another seventh-century emperor Constans II (641–68), who did have a distinctive beard: see E.W. Brooks, 'Who was Constantine Pogonatus?', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 17 (1908): pp. 460–62. Baldwin, 'Physical Descriptions', p. 19, suggests that Constantine Pogonatus 'should get the credit for setting the fashion' for beards.

7 N. Oikonomidès, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et Xe siècles: introduction, texte, traduction et commentaire* (Paris, 1972), p. 135, line 9. For discussion of Philotheos' treatise and eunuch and 'bearded' officials see for instance S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London; New York, 2008), pp. 57–60.

8 S.M. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation with Commentary and Introduction* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT, 2008), pp. 71 and 206. The dreambook of Daniel 'is commonly accepted as the earliest Byzantine oneirocriticon': Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 2. Most date it to the fourth century but it could date to at least as late as the seventh century. See also Artemidorus 1.30, (ed.) R.A. Pack, *Artemidori Daldiani, Onirocriticon Libri V* (Leipzig, 1963), p. 37.

9 Amatus, 4.36–9, (trans.) P.N. Dunbar, *Amatus of Montecassino*, *The History of the Normans, Revised with an Introduction and Notes by Graham A. Loud* (Woodbridge;

Rochester, NY, 2004), pp. 123–5.

¹⁰ For discussion and comment see for instance Constable, ‘Beards’, pp. 63–4, 97, 110–12.

¹¹ N.M. el Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), p. 98.

¹² N.B. Kampen, E. Marlowe and R.M. Molholt (eds), *What is a Man? Changing Images of Masculinity in Late Antique Art* (Portland, OR, 2002), p. 25.

¹³ See for instance N.B. Kampen, ‘What is a Man?’, in Kampen, Marlowe and Molholt (eds), *Changing Images of Masculinity*, pp. 3–15, at 7–8.

¹⁴ See for instance P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA, 1995). See also R.R.R. Smith, ‘Cultural Choice and Political Identity in Honorific Portrait Statues in the Greek East in the Second Century A.D.’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 88 (1998): pp. 56–93, at 86–7.

¹⁵ S. Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon’s Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford; New York, 2007), p. 13, notes that ‘the beard has no place’ in Polemon’s *Physiognomy* (dating originally to the second century AD), and questions whether the assumption that beards are a vital sign of maleness is correct (and see also Smith, ‘Honorific Portrait Statues’, esp. 83–7). However, many other sources do testify to the importance of the beard in relation to gender so I would suggest that the reason for Polemon’s silence must be sought elsewhere. Was he deliberately avoiding the topic (see the interesting comments of J. Elsner, ‘Physiognomics: Art and Text’, in Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face*, pp. 203–24, at 218)?

¹⁶ See Chrysippus’ argument against shaving in his *On the Good and Pleasure* (Athenaeus 13.565), cited in Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, pp. 108–09.

¹⁷ On Christians and beards see for instance Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, pp. 290 and 335.

¹⁸ See Zanker, *Mask of Socrates*, p. 220.

¹⁹ Clement’s comments on the beard are found especially at *Paidogogos* 3.3, (ed.) M. Marcovich, *Clementis Alexandrini Paedagogus* (Leiden; Boston, 2002), pp. 157–63, (trans.) S.P. Wood, *Clement of Alexandria, Christ the Educator* (New York, 1954), pp. 211–20. On Clement on hairiness see also for instance the comments of M.W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), pp. 68–70.

²⁰ Marcovich, *Paedagogus*, p. 159, points to parallels with views expressed by Musonius Rufus and Epictetus. For the question, for instance, of the influence of Musonius Rufus on Clement see for example C. Pomeroy Parker, ‘Musonius in Clement’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 12 (1901): pp. 191–200; C.E. Lutz, ‘Musonius Rufus: “The Roman Socrates”’, *Yale Classical Studies*, 10 (1947): pp. 3–147, at 20 and n. 83.

²¹ On this familiar ideology see for instance M. Harlow and R. Laurence, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome: A Life Course Approach* (London; New York, 2002), p. 73, and C.A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (2nd edn, New York, 2010), pp. 141–5.

²² *Paid.* 3.3.17: Καὶ εἰ μὴ τις αὐτοὺς γυμνοὺς ἴδοι, κἂν γυναικας ὑπολάβοι.

²³ *Paid.* 3.3.18: Ὁ γὰρ θεὸς τὴν μὲν γυναικα λείαν ἠθέλησεν εἶναι ... τὸν δὲ ἄνδρα καθάπερ τοὺς λέοντας γενεῖσις κοσμήσας καὶ τοῖς λαοῖσις ἡνδρώσε στήθεσι· δεῖγμα τοῦτο ἀλκῆς καὶ ἀρχῆς. The lion is appealed to again at *Paid.* 3.3.24 (ed. Marcovich, p. 162, (trans.) Wood, p. 219): ‘The lion’s glory is his shagginess; he is equipped with so much hair to protect himself’ (Λέοντες μὲν οὖν αὐχοῦσι τὸ λάσιον αὐτῶν, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀλκῆς ὀπλίζονται τῇ τριχί). On the value of a hairy chest see also the Leiden Polemon (an Arabic translation of the Greek text

in a manuscript in Leiden), in Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face*, pp. 433–5: it signifies ‘seriousness of thought and magnanimity’. The Leiden Polemon also interprets thick hair from the neck to the head as indicating ‘strength, power, and magnanimity, because of its similarity with the hair of the lion’: Swain (ed.), *Seeing the Face*, p. 435.

²⁴ *Paid.* 3.3.19.

²⁵ *Paid.* 3.3.19: Τὸ οὖν τῆς ἀνδρώδους φύσεως σύμβολον ... παρανομεῖν ἀνόσιον.

²⁶ The reference to the *Odyssey* is at *Paid.* 3.11.60 (ed. Marcovich, p. 183). Musonius Rufus 21 (Lutz, ‘Musonius’, pp. 128–9) sees the beard as essential for a man too, remarking ‘the beard is nature’s symbol of the male just as is the crest of the cock and the mane of the lion’ (τὸν δὲ πώγωνα καὶ σύμβολον γεγονέναι τοῦ ἄρρενος, ὥσπερ ἀλεκτρυόνι λόφον καὶ λένοντι χαίτην). He also comments adversely on men who are concerned to beautify themselves by styling their hair and shaving: ‘such men have become slaves of luxurious living and are completely enervated, men who can endure being seen as womanish creatures, hermaphrodites, something which real men would avoid at all costs’ (σαφῶς οὗτοί γε κατεαγότες ὑπὸ τῆς τρυφῆς καὶ ἐκνενευρισμένοι παντάπασι, οἳ γε ἀνέχονται ἀνδρόγυνοι καὶ γυναικῶδεις ὁράσθαι ὄντες, ὅπερ ἔδει φεύγειν ἐξ ἀπαντος, εἰ δὴ τῷ ὄντι ἄνδρες ἦσαν).

²⁷ On the long thick beard of the philosopher (which signifies dignity) see also Artemidorus 1.30, (ed.) Pack, p. 36; (trans.) R.J. White, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica by Artemidorus* (Park Ridge, NJ, 1975), p. 31.

²⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus 25.4.22, (ed. and trans.) J.C. Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, vol. 2 (rev. edn, London; Cambridge, MA, 1950–52), pp. 512–13.

²⁹ Julian, *Misopogon* 338B–339B, (ed.) C. Prato and D. Micallella, *Giuliano Imperatore, Misopogon. Edizione critica, traduzione e commento* (Rome, 1979), pp. 4–6; (trans.) W.C. Wright, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. 2 (London, 1913), pp. 422–5. See also *Mis.* 342C–D, (ed.) Prato and Micallella, p. 16; (trans.) Wright, pp. 434–5: ‘all of you are handsome and tall and smooth-skinned and beardless; for young and old alike you are emulous of the happiness of the Phaeacians’ (καλοὶ δὲ πάντες καὶ μεγάλοι καὶ λεῖοι καὶ ἀγένειοι, νέοι τε ὁμοίως καὶ πρεσβύτεροι ζηλωταὶ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας [καὶ] τῶν Φαιάκων); *Mis.* 346A, (eds) Prato and Micallella, p. 26; (trans.) Wright, pp. 442–3: ‘boys who in their beauty emulate women, and men who have not only their jaws shaved smooth but their whole bodies too, so that those who meet them may think them smoother than women’ (παιδάρια περὶ κάλλους ἀμιλλώμενα ταῖς γυναιξίν, ἄνδρας ἀποψιλουμένους οὐτὶ τὰς γνάθους μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἅπαν τὸ σῶμα, λειότεροι τῶν γυναικῶν ὅπως φαίνονται τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν); *Mis.* 349C–D, (ed.) Prato and Micallella, p. 32; (trans.) Wright, pp. 452–3, on his appearance as an old man rather than as a youth: ‘by beautifying myself I might have appeared as a blooming boy and transformed myself into a youth, if not in years, at any rate in manners and effeminacy of features’ (ἐξὸν φανῆναι τῷ καλλωπισμῷ παιδα ὥραϊον καὶ γενέσθαι μενράκιον, εἰ μὴ τὴν ἡλικίαν, τὸν τρόπον γε καὶ τὴν ἀβρότητα τοῦ προσώπου); and *Mis.* 365A, (ed.) Prato and Micallella, p. 66, (trans.) Wright, pp. 494–5, on Julian and his entourage not falling in love with a beautiful youth.

³⁰ *Mis.* 339B–C, (ed.) Prato and Micallella, p. 6; (trans.) Wright, pp. 424–7: ἔστι μοι τὸ στῆθος δασύ καὶ λάσιον ὥσπερ τῶν λεόντων, οἵπερ βασιλεύουσι τῶν θηρίων, οὐδὲ ἐποίησα λεῖον αὐτὸ πώποτε ... οὐδὲ ἄλλο τι μέρος τοῦ σώματος εἰργασάμην λεῖον οὐδὲ μαλακόν.

³¹ And also Musonius: see nn. 23 and 26 above.

³² Constable, ‘Beards’, p. 50.

33 Ibid.

34 Synesius, *In Praise of Baldness*, (ed. and trans.) J. Lamoureux and N. Aujoulat, *Synésios de Cyrène*, vol. 4, *Opuscles* 1 (Paris, 2004), pp. 48–90.

35 Lamoureux and Aujoulat (eds), *Synésios de Cyrène*, p. 10.

36 For instance, he points out that wise men, such as Socrates and Diogenes, are depicted bald; that the bald head is spherical and the sphere is a divine shape. Towards the end he sums up: '[B]aldness is divine and related to the divine, that it is the fulfilment of nature, and a real shrine to the god through whom we have wisdom ... hair has all the opposites of these things, lack of reason, animal propensities, and all that is of the part opposed to God' (trans.) A. Fitzgerald, *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene* (London, 1930), p. 270; Synesius, *In Praise of Baldness* 20.5, (ed.) Lamoureux and Aujoulat, pp. 84–5. I have unfortunately not had access to the Greek text.

37 He admits illness might result in women going bald, but only temporarily.

38 Synesius, *In Praise of Baldness* 15.3–16.4, (trans.) Lamoureux and Aujoulat, pp. 75–7. Lamoureux and Aujoulat, *Synésios de Cyrène*, p. 36, note Synesius' general lack of engagement with the subject of the beard.

39 Head, 'Physical Descriptions', p. 231. Constable, 'Beards', p. 88, p. 110 n. 314, and p. 115, also refers vaguely to fashion.

40 Is there a connection with the iconography of the bearded Christ becoming dominant over that of the beardless Christ?

41 Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, p. 3.

42 e.g. Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, esp. pp. 72–3. For hair clipping in the Greek world see for example R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age* (London, 1990), pp. 179–80 (and the notes at pp. 326–7 listing examples), where Garland comments: 'Conceivably this act may have symbolised the end of a young person's growing years, since it was widely believed that cutting the hair was liable to terminate growth.' On the Roman world see also C. Vout, *Power and Eroticism in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge; New York, 2007), p. 189. P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens* (Paris, 1991), p. 49, notes in the context of the reign of Julian that a Christian Diodoros was killed by pagans because he had cut off boys' curls so that they would not be able to be dedicated to the gods.

43 Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, p. 73.

44 *Paidogogos* 3.3.18, (ed.) Marcovich, p. 159, (trans.) Wood, p. 214: Καὶ οὕτως περὶ πολλοῦ τὰς τρίχας ταύτας ὁ θεὸς ἡγεῖται ὥστε ἅμα φρονήσει κελεύειν παραγίνεσθαι αὐτὰς τοῖς ἀνδράσι ...

45 Harlow and Laurence, *Growing Up*, pp. 17–18.

46 Bartlett, 'Meanings of Hair', 47.

47 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* 2.23, (ed.) J.J. Reiske, vol. 1 (Bonn, 1829), pp. 620–22. See S. Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden; New York, 1997), pp. 46–8. Perhaps the rite occurred when Leo (born in 866) was heir apparent, after the death of Constantine in 879 and before his accession in 886 (excluding his 3 year/month imprisonment). In relation to the western cases Bartlett, 'Meanings of Hair', p. 48, comments: 'An important relationship was established between the boy whose hair was cut and the person who cut it'.

48 *Liber Pontificalis* 83: Benedictus II, (ed.) T. Mommsen, *Liber Pontificalis (Pars prior)*, *Gesta Pontificum Romanorum* 1.1, (Munich, 1898; repr. 1982), pp. 203–04; (trans.) R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715* (2nd edn, Liverpool, 2000), p. 82.

49 See for instance Tougher, *Eunuch in Byzantine History*, p. 75.

50 See also the comments of Constable, 'Beards', pp. 61–2.

51 The negative connotations of youth are reflected, for instance, by Synesius: he associates youth with lack of intelligence (6.5) and sudden anger (17.2), and male maturity with baldness (i.e. ageing) (17.4).

52 Procopius, *Wars* 8.21.6.–21, (ed. and trans.) H.B. Dewing, *Procopius, History of the Wars*, vol. 5 (London, 1928), pp. 272–7.

53 Procopius, *Wars* 4.12.28, (ed.) Dewing, *Procopius*, vol. 2 (London, 1916), pp. 312–13: καὶ τότε Μαυρουσίων τοὺς ὑπολειπομένους γυναικῶν τῶν σφετέρων τὸ λόγιον ἔσῃει, ὥς ἄρα τὸ γένος αὐτοῖς πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἀγενεῖου ὀλεῖται.

54 See for instance R. Guillard, 'Les Eunuques dans l'empire byzantine: étude de titulaire et de prosopographie byzantines', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 1 (1943): 197–238, at 205–14.

55 On this see now M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (New York, 2009), esp. pp. 93–6.

56 Artemidorus 2.69, (ed.) Pack, p. 196; (trans.) White, p. 134. For hostility to eunuchs (by birth) see also (the probably fourth -century ad) Adamantius, *Physiognomy*, B3, (ed.) Swain, *Seeing the Face*, pp. 518–19.

57 Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 121. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 9, favours 'a late ninth or early tenth-century date' for this dreambook. See also the dreambook of Germanus: Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 155. On this shift see Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 121 n. 33, who understands it in terms of 'variances in cultural attitudes'.

58 M. Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and its Arabic Sources* (Leiden; Boston, 2002), pp. 268–9.

59 On angels and military victory see also the *oneirocriticon* of Nicephorus: Oberhelman, *Dreambooks*, p. 138.

60 See for instance S. Tougher, 'Cherchez l'homme! Byzantine Men: A Eunuch Perspective', in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine World* (London; New York, 2010), pp. 83–91, at 86.

61 See especially K.M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), and now also Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body*, esp. p. 101. For reservations see Tougher, *Eunuch in Byzantine History*, esp. pp. 96–111.

62 Statius, *Silvae* 3.4, (ed. and trans.) D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Statius*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA; London, 2003), pp. 216–25.

63 Vout, *Power and Eroticism*, p. 181.

64 Martial, *Epigrams* 9.36, (ed. and trans.) D.R. Shackleton Bailey, *Martial, Epigrams*, vol. 2, LCL (Cambridge, MA; London, 1993), pp. 262–3. Ganymede wants to make the transition to manhood, but then Jupiter reminds him that if this occurred he would no longer be able to be his cupbearer.

65 Claudian, *In Eutropium* 1.72–7, (ed. and trans.) M. Platnauer, *Claudian*, vol. 1, London; New York, 1922), pp. 142–5: *femina, cum senuit, retinet conubia partu, uxorisque decus matris reverentia pensat ... cum forma dilapsus amor; defloruit oris gratia ... qua placeam ratione senex?*

66 Claudian, *In Eutropium* 1.110–31, (ed.) Platnauer, pp. 146–9.

67 See especially Tougher, *Eunuch in Byzantine History*, pp. 60–67.

68 See S. Tougher, 'Images of Effeminate Men: the Case of Byzantine Eunuchs', in D. Hadley (ed.), *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London; New York, 1999), pp. 89–100, p. 93.

Chapter 10

The Spiritual Valency of Gender in Byzantine Society

Damien Casey

Gender illuminates the hierarchies that structure society as well as the tension between what is and what should be the case. How gender is understood articulates the values of a society and hence its ideas of justice, order and what should be striven for. This is because it expresses what is most basic to humanity and how we understand difference and relation, the most fundamental of all differences amongst people being sexual difference. The study of gender is especially useful in the study of Byzantine society as it helps to illuminate the tensions present in its foundational values: between Greek and Christian attitudes to the body and the spirit, and between Christian aspirations and the values of the Byzantine world from Late Antiquity to the late Byzantine period. Taft identifies the idea of ‘order’ (τάξις) as the key factor affecting the place of women in Byzantine society. According to Taft, the concept of *taxis*, ‘a place for everyone and everyone in his/her place’, was a rule of thumb no one would have imagined challenging in Byzantine culture.¹ Gender in Byzantine culture was not only implicitly hierarchical but was also firmly linked with spiritual authority.

In this chapter I examine various tensions arising from this dual heritage and suggest how some of the attempts to reconcile them brought about certain distinctive features of Byzantine civilization.² I explore the impact of the spiritual value of gender on Byzantine attitudes to virginity and marriage, and finally examine where eunuchs fit within this scheme: did their degendered state give them a unique spiritual valency?

In my exploration of gender in the Byzantine world, I am guided by the work of Luce Irigaray and her questioning of the metaphysical foundations of our conception of sexual difference. To the extent that metaphysics attempts to look beyond appearances to the essence of things, beyond the transient realm of becoming to the permanent world of being, beyond the many to the one, it has often relegated sexual difference to the realm of appearances, the material world. Thinking through sexual difference in Byzantine society means

uncovering the presuppositions of its metaphysicians with regard to what they considered to be of ultimate (spiritual) value.³

Byzantine Asceticism

If embodiment matters, as it clearly did in Byzantine society, then gender is fundamental, but for many church fathers the two concepts (embodiment and gender) belonged to different realms. Gender is about the values and relationships of the fallen world, but the resurrection of the body is dogma. Even the fourth-century church father Gregory of Nyssa (d.394) expresses confusion over this tension when submitting to the superior judgement of his sister Macrina in his tract on physical resurrection, *On the soul and resurrection*. In the dialogue between the ascetic bishop Gregory and his sister, a consecrated virgin, one gets the impression that Gregory is reluctantly making a faith statement that is at odds with his current understanding when he states his belief in the (physical) resurrection: 'But there is a resurrection, and that it is not absurd'.⁴ Gregory's confusion stems from his wrestling with the theological question: how can our physical particularities have eternal worth?

The Radical Embodiment of the Incarnation

The Byzantines inherited from the Christian tradition a tension between flesh and spirit that finds its clearest and definitive expression in the doctrine of the incarnation. It was a common presupposition of the Graeco-Roman world into which Christianity was born that the divine was so far above the world that any direct association with matter would contaminate the divinity. Indeed, the radical nature of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation was recognised in the late third or early fourth century by the Greek pagan philosopher Porphyry, who wrote against the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, arguing that it was something much worse than idolatry:⁵

Εἰ δὲ καὶ τις τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὕτω κοῦφος τὴν γνώμην, ὥς ἐν τοῖς ἀγάλμασιν ἔνδον οἰκεῖν νομίζειν τοὺς θεοὺς, πολλῶ καθαρώτερον εἶχε τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ πιστεύοντος ὅτι εἰς τὴν γαστέρα Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου εἰσέδου τὸ θεῖον, ἔμβρυόν τε ἐγένετο καὶ τεχθὲν ἐσπαργανώθη, μεστὸν αἵματος χορίου καὶ χολῆς καὶ τῶν ἔτι πολλῶ τούτων ἀτοπωτέρων.

[If some Greeks are light-headed enough to believe that the gods live inside idols, their thought remains much purer than that [of the Christians] who believe that the divinity entered the Virgin Mary's womb, became a foetus,

was engendered, and wrapped in clothes, was full of blood, membranes, gall, and even viler things.]

The concept of the incarnation cuts against the grain of the Hellenistic duality of spirit and matter. According to Plato, the material world was transient and mutable; only the spirit, which does not pass away, was truly real. This distinction between the true world that persists in being, and the transient world of becoming, is the foundational gesture of Hellenistic metaphysics. Under the influence of eastern philosophy that followed Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, this division and dualism was intensified in Hellenistic thought. In the popular imagination, it was only a simple step to move from the idea that the material world had no real existence, to the idea that it should have no existence. God and the world became not merely distinct but contradictory opposites. When the traditional Greek gods descended into the human realm, they invariably violated and destroyed humanity.⁶ The incarnation of the Christian God as a man, with male flesh, however, did violence to neither humanity nor God. What part did the 'maleness' of Christ play in shaping Byzantine notions of spiritual value?

A Gendered Image of God

The problematic of the image of God can be profitably situated in relation to the hermeneutical problem of the two creation accounts found in the first few chapters of Genesis. In as far as these two accounts together constitute the primary myths of origin for both Judaism and Christianity, then how these texts are read will be a good indicator of the metaphysical assumptions that the interpreter brings to the text. These texts are particularly apt for our purposes because they introduce both the idea of humanity as *imago Dei*, and the origin and construction of sexual difference. Although source critics identify two distinct accounts, they cannot really be separated since the canon as received has placed them together in such a manner that the second account reads as an elaboration or explication of the first. There remains, however, a tension or space between the two accounts that creates an interpretative vacuum that needs to be filled. It is in the filling of this gap that the metaphysics of the interpreter reveals itself.

The first creation account in the first chapter of Genesis describes the creation of humanity as the final and ultimate act of creation, in which humanity as male and female is made in the image of God. 'God created the man [*hā'ādām*] in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.' (Gen 1:27)

The second creation account begins with the creation of *adam*,⁷ from whom woman is eventually constructed. The initial status of man as androgynous, ungendered, or male is open to interpretation, although the most common assumption is that *adam* (*hā'ādām*) is Adam and, therefore, male.

A dominant interpretation of these texts finds one of its earliest expressions in the writing of Philo of Alexandria, in the first century. Philo is broadly representative of what Daniel Boyarin describes as 'a Hellenistic Jewish cultural *koine* throughout the eastern Mediterranean'.⁸ Philo is also important because of the impact of his thought on Christian thinking that paved the way for the rapid Hellenization of Christianity. Philo regarded the two biblical creation accounts to be two entirely different creative acts on the part of God. The first *adam*, Philo considered to be an entirely spiritual being whose non-corporeal existence was equally inclusive of both male and female. 'He' is the prototype of the ideal of the 'universal subject'. According to Philo, it was in this wholly spiritual creature that the image of God lay. Accordingly, its androgyny must be understood spiritually, which means that the creature was really neither male nor female. 'The fundamental point is that for Hellenistic Jews, the oneness of pure spirit is ontologically privileged in the constitution of humanity.'⁹ On this point, Philo is explicit: 'He that was after the (divine) image was an idea or type or seal, an object of thought (only), incorporeal, neither male nor female, by nature incorruptible.'¹⁰ For Philo, the essential self, what we would call the subject, is prior to gender and universal. The division into the sexes as a creative act is secondary and ultimately something to be overcome if we are to aspire to reflect fully the image of the divine once more. The implication of this interpretation was that, for Philo and for the Christian thinkers who followed him, spiritual progress and achievement was, in principle, as real a possibility for women as it was for men.

Philo's idea of the dual creation of humanity was taken up by many Greek Christian fathers including Clement of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus the Confessor.¹¹ Further, they believed that gender distinctions would be absent in the age to come, superseded by the unity of the body of Christ which would also subsume all other divisions and difference.¹² In his discussion with Macrina, Gregory of Nyssa concluded that sexual organs would be present in the resurrected body but redundant, because it would have no need of marriage.¹³

Attaining Male Gender: Female Martyrs

Despite equality 'in principle' between women and men, the price of 'transcendence' was higher for women than for men. The cost was greater for women because, despite the claim that the spirit transcended gender, the discipline required for transcendence was considered to be a manly virtue. In practice, the equality of the sexes consisted in the ability of women to 'become male'.¹⁴ Women were required to renounce their specificity as women in a manner that would have been unthinkable for men. Vibia Perpetua was the model of female martyrdom from the third century. A document purported to be Perpetua's prison diary reports her 'transcendence' of womanhood as the culmination of a long process by which Perpetua, herself a young mother in the process of weaning her baby, had successfully weaned herself from her maternal instincts and attachments.¹⁵ Her maternal love was the 'last temptation' to be overcome in order to achieve perfect martyrdom.¹⁶ The writings of the early church fathers consistently affirm that the transcendence of the bodily limitations of sex enables one to live, as Augustine suggests, 'according to the inward man neither male nor female; so that even in them that are women in body the manliness of their souls hides the sex of their flesh'.¹⁷ The transcendent spirit turns out to be male after all.¹⁸

It is tempting to make the comparison between the aspirations of Late Antiquity towards the pregendered soul in its autonomy from the body and its latter day equivalent in modernity's ideal of disembodied rationality and the universal subject. However, the most interesting comparison to be made between contemporary feminism and the church fathers lies in the difference between their respective approaches to the sex/gender distinction. Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated that, up until the Enlightenment, sex and the body were often considered epiphenomena, while gender was a primary ontological category.¹⁹ There was a fixed relationship between male gender and the values attached to it, as there was between the female gender and its attached (inferior) values. While most contemporary philosophers recognise sex as biologically based, and gender as a cultural construct, this was not the view of Byzantine theologians. For them, gender and its value were eternal and spiritual, while biological sex was fluid and contingent, able to be changed by ascetic practices. Changing the body meant changing one's gender, always towards an archetypal maleness, which was equated with spiritual perfection. There are no stories of Byzantine monks pretending to be women (at least none that survive in improving spiritual texts like the *Apophthegmata*, a collection of sayings from the eastern desert fathers).

Bodies could change because they belonged to the realm of becoming, but gender as the social meaning attributed to the body was considered eternal. Male and female bodies were not equal. To

change one's status, one had to transform one's body through ascetic practices of renunciation, like the martyr Perpetua or the ascetic Mary of Egypt. Even if the ideal state of humanity transcended sex and gender, this ideal was ultimately identified with the male (the recapitulated Adam, according to Irenaeus, is Jesus Christ).²⁰ Sexuality was seen by prominent thinkers like Augustine as result of the Fall, which women seemed to embody much more closely than men. Woman, as derivative of man, was only able to achieve the image of God through man.

To sum up, the concept of being made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27) was a symbolic cornerstone which underpinned Byzantine society's collective goals and ambitions, its conception of God and its idea and ideal of humanity. Byzantine anthropology, therefore, is never entirely separable from its theology.

Byzantine Christianity also treasured the distinction between the 'image' and 'likeness' of God (Gen. 1:26). We 'possess the one by creation; we acquire the other by free will', as Gregory of Nyssa put it.²¹ According to John Damascene, the intellect and free will reveal 'that which is according to the image' (τὸ μὲν γὰρ κατ' εἰκόνα), while 'that which is according to the likeness' (τὸ δὲ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν) is manifest in acquiring virtue.²² With such a low view of the material body, especially the female body, it was inevitable that the early Greek fathers would locate the acquisition of virtue in the process of human divinisation, or transcending human boundaries, including those of gender.

The Divinised Male

The traditional view of the *imago Dei*, as shaped by Hellenistic metaphysics, has been that 'man' pursues his own divinity through his mastery over nature. This interpretation has a firm foundation in the biblical text itself, with the proclamation of humanity's stewardship of creation placed between the two affirmations of the divine image in humanity. This interpretation of the image of God is further strengthened by the metaphysical privileging of spirit over matter, and the ideal of the patriarchal household. Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that: 'the generic Adam of Gen. 1:27a who was created to exercise God's dominion as God's image is an androcentric patriarchal construct in which Adam, like the *paterfamilias*, is a collective person who exercises sovereignty for himself, and for and as the whole family'.²³

Accordingly, for most Greek churchmen for whom manifesting the image of God lay in exercising dominion, women could not be

considered to be in the image of God. Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, for example, often cited Paul's statement that man *qua* male 'is the image and glory of God but woman is the glory of man' (1Cor.11:17). The best that could be said of women was that they were 'images of the image'.²⁴

This limited understanding of the value of physical sex and gender runs counter to the inclusivity reflected in the early baptismal formula cited by St Paul, which states that in Christ: 'There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female' (Gal. 3:28). The principal focus of this passage is the abolition of all hierarchical binary relations in communion with Christ. Communion in Christ enables us to work to restore the 'likeness' of God. But does the formula from Galatians have as its intention the abolition of sexual difference and every other contingency? Jesus' statement in Luke 20 would seem to suggest as much.²⁵

The ideal of 'the life of the angels' was first expressed in withdrawal from the world (*askesis*), but in later Byzantine centuries, as we shall see, it came to be associated also with eunuchs, who were very much in the world. Let us first consider how some Byzantine women practised the angelic life of asceticism.

Holy Women of Byzantium

We find typical Byzantine attitudes to gender reflected in words given to female ascetics by their hagiographers. The *Life of Mary of Egypt*, for example, narrates how a former prostitute achieved sanctity through repentance and the life of a solitary ascetic in the harsh Jordanian desert. According to her hagiographer, her body 'was black, as if tanned by the scorching of the sun'.²⁶ She had lived for 47 years without encountering another human being, until she met the monk Zosimas. As her clothes had long since fallen away, she was naked and fled the approach of Zosimas, who – thinking her a great man of God – had pursued her for her blessing. When Zosimas finally confronted her, she turned away, protesting: '[I]f you are really willing to grant one favor to a sinful woman, throw me the garment that you are wearing, so that with it I may cover my feminine weakness and turn toward you and receive your blessing.'²⁷

Karen Jo Torjesen observes that, for male hagiographers, it was the rendering of the body of the female ascetic asexual that was more remarkable than even the woman's renunciations. While she recognizes that their male admirers employed a 'masculine terminology for excellence', she suggests that 'for ascetic women

gender-crossing meant more than becoming male, it meant in some way transcending gender altogether'.²⁸ This would be consistent with the Pauline understanding that the transcendence of sexual hierarchy could only be achieved by a rejection of the values of a world that was sustained by that same hierarchy in an 'eschatologically qualified asceticism'.²⁹

Torjesen believes that one can find the female perspective on this in the following speech from the *Life of St Eugenia*, whose feast falls on 24 December, or 6 January in the eastern Orthodox calendar. Although a third-century Roman martyr, her speech witnesses to attitudes and values that will shape Byzantine society, and offers some interesting contrasts. According to the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*, St Eugenia entered the monastery dressed as a man and led such an exemplary life that she eventually became the abbot. Accused of adultery, Eugenia gave the following defence before the judge who turned out to be her own father:³⁰

Tanta enim est virtus nominis ejus, ut etiam feminae in timore ejus positae virilem obtineant dignitatem ... et ex confidentia quam in Christo habui, nolui esse femina, sed virginitatem immaculatam tota animi intentione conservans, virum gessi constanter in Christo. Non enim infrunitam honestatis simulationem assumpsi, ut vir feminam simularem; sed femina viriliter agendo, virum gessi, virginitatem quae in Christo est fortiter amplectendo.

[For so great is the power of [Christ's] name, that even women who stand in fear of it achieve the dignity of men [O]ut of the faith I have in Christ, *not wishing to be a woman* but to preserve an immaculate virginity, I have steadfastly acted *as a man*. For I have not simply put on a *meaningless appearance* of honor, such that while *seeming* a man I might play the part of a woman, but rather, although a woman, I have acted the part of a man by behaving with manliness, by boldly embracing the chastity which is alone in Christ.]

Even here the transcendence of gender in Christ is articulated in terms of manliness. Torjesen suggests that in Eugenia we can hear an authentic woman's voice, but I wonder whether Mary of Egypt's might be a better candidate, even if it is a voice that has internalised the male perspective on female shame. Perhaps a more fruitful comparison with the *Life of St Eugenia* can be made with that of the *Life of St Mary/Marinos*.³¹ According to this *Life*, on the death of his wife, a man called Eugenio sought to enter the monastery. His daughter Mary pleaded to go with him, but her father protested, asserting that 'through the members of your sex ... the devil wages war on the servants of God.' To which his daughter responded, 'Not so, my lord, for I shall not enter <the monastery> as you say, but I

shall first cut off the hair of my head, and clothe myself like a man, and then enter the monastery with you.’³²

Mary/Marinos progresses in a life of exemplary piety in a cenobitic monastery until she, like Eugenia, is also accused of fathering a child. In contrast to Eugenia, however, Marinos does not deny the accusation but falls on her face saying, ‘Forgive me, father, for I have sinned as a man.’³³ After an initial expulsion from the monastery, Marinos is readmitted where she raises the child as her own. Her sex, and consequently her innocence of the paternity charges, were not revealed until after her death, upon which all the monks repent of their wrong doing. Marinos’ martyrdom consists not in giving public witness but in silent forbearance and, as such, her witness is all the more compelling to those monks to whom the witness is given.

Nicholas Conostas’ interpretation of the story of Mary/Marinos is most insightful in suggesting how the figure of the holy transvestite nun came to symbolise ‘the ambiguities, tensions, and hostility that often comprised early Christian attitudes toward women’.³⁴ Mary/Marinos reconciles and embodies those tensions within herself. She has an active, ‘virile temperament’ and yet at the same time is passive in her acceptance of marginalisation and victimhood. Conostas suggest that it is precisely the feminine virtues that serve to ‘amplify and balance’ masculine strength and hence subvert its authoritative claims to dominance and hegemony.³⁵ This suggestion provides a nice counterpoint to Caroline Walker Bynum’s suggestion with regards to the medieval West that the ‘male appropriation of the notion of woman as weak sometimes became a claim to superior lowliness ... women were too weak to be women’.³⁶

The Byzantine fascination with transvestite nuns like Mary/Marinos was at least partially due to the fact that they were liminal figures who highlighted the contradictions within Byzantine society. They posed a question, but also offered the possibility of reconciling tensions. They subverted the symbolic universe while at the same time offering a rite of transition. As Conostas explains:³⁷ ‘[T]he process of initiation and transformation is a passage from one social role or status to another, and as such it marks boundaries and defines categories. It suggests that society consists not of individuals but of types, signified by costume and dress.’

Attitudes to Virginity and Marriage

Having examined some of the numerous tensions that underpinned the Byzantine symbolic universe, I now turn to the ways in which Byzantine society sought to reconcile the division between flesh and

spirit, male and female, gender hierarchy and its abolition in Christ, and between being and becoming. We see the beginning of an attempt at reconciliation in the reflections of the Cappadocians, especially Gregory of Nyssa, on the relative merits of living like angels or living according to the flesh.

While virginity is certainly highly praised among the Christians of Late Antiquity, recent scholarship has begun to question any simple reading of the supposed superiority of celibacy over marriage. Beginning with Mark D. Hart's reading of Gregory of Nyssa's praise of celibacy as intentionally ironic,³⁸ closer attention has been paid to Gregory's rhetoric. Hart has shown that, in his interpretation of the Pauline teaching regarding the superiority of celibacy, Gregory of Nyssa holds such a preference to be true only in the absence of true virtue, when one is under the delusion that marriage and its necessary involvement with the world are enough for immortality. Gregory rather holds to the unity of body and soul and argues that the alleged separation is the result of vice that, in privileging the body, divides what should be united, thus resolving the Pauline conflict between the 'law of the body' and the 'law of the mind'.³⁹

Valerie Karras rejects Hart's reading of Gregory's rhetoric on marriage and virginity as ironic but argues that Gregory's *On Virginity* should be read as a 'subversive restructuring' of the traditional foundations of both:⁴⁰

Gregory first *deconstructs* late antique assumptions and certain Christian misconceptions of the virtues of marriage and virginity, respectively. He then *reconstructs* both marriage as a lifestyle that offers the possibility for a virtuous life of service (*leitourgia*) and virginity as a positive and active mode of life, using his brother Basil's service-oriented monasticism as his model.

What matters for Gregory, Karras argues, is the ethical and other-oriented life of service as it is lived in both vocational paths. Physical virginity is not sufficient. 'Achieving it is not as simple as one might think, nor is it confined to the body; it pertains to all things and extends even to thought which is considered one of the achievements of the soul.'⁴¹

The idea of marriage as *leitourgia*, a public service, is given clear expression in Gregory Nazianzen's poem *In Praise of Virginity*, in which the personification of marriage and virginity debate with each other as to which is the better calling. Although virginity triumphs, marriage is given high praise. This law and union of love, which is also the law of God, is a work of reconciliation.⁴² Marriage, for Gregory Nazianzen, does not remove the believer from God but brings him/her all the closer to God, for it is God who draws us to it. Both Cappadocian fathers are keen to acknowledge marriage as a genuine path of

deification even if ultimately they consider virginity to be the better path.

The Byzantine (and Roman) ambivalence towards women manifesting holiness is clear from the importation of Levitical ideas of ritual purity into Christianity from as early as the mid third century: the prohibition against menstruating women receiving communion, or even entering the church.⁴³ Similarly, involuntary nocturnal emissions were considered to be polluting and thus a cause for the exclusion of laymen and clergy from communion (but not from attending church, as with the women in menstruation) and clergy from celebrating the Eucharist.⁴⁴ Marital relations themselves came to be considered polluting. Such attitudes entered into legislation at the Council of Trullo in 692 with the requirement of continence on the part of clergy the day before they were to celebrate the liturgy, ‘for those approaching the altar when the holy gifts are handled must be wholly continent that they may obtain what they ask sincerely of God’.⁴⁵

It is worth noting that such developments were initially viewed with suspicion, as being contrary to the Gospel and a symptom of Judaizing. David Brakke has shown that the *Didascalia apostolorum* and the *Constitutiones apostolorum* reveal that ‘church leaders in Syria criticized Christians who abstained from the Eucharist during menstruation or after a seminal emission’.⁴⁶ Around the same year as the composition of the latter text, the bishops present at the Council of Laodicea in 380 made the first recorded attempt to legislate the exclusion of women from the sanctuary.⁴⁷ Especially interesting is the decree from the same synod that ‘one should not institute in church those called female presbyters [πρεσβύτιδας] or presiders’.⁴⁸

Female deacons, however, continued to be ordained, and numbers reached their peak in the early Byzantine period. Karras contrasts this with the middle Byzantine period where, ‘particularly following iconoclasm, the evidence [for female deacons] becomes increasingly scanty and simultaneously more ambiguous’.⁴⁹ Although male and female deacons differed in their functions, a mid eighth century codex describing the rite for instituting both male and female deacons ‘show an almost exact parallelism’. Most notably, ‘both were ordained in the bema, that is, within the sanctuary ... an area of the church from which the laity – and *a fortiori* all laywomen – except the emperor were normally barred’.⁵⁰

Eunuchs: A Third Gender or No Gender?

I conclude with a brief discussion of eunuchs and angels as in some manner exemplifying the Byzantine synthesis. The Byzantine world

was clearly uncomfortable with eunuchs as they did not fit into well-defined categories. They defied *taxis*. As Kathryn Ringrose has explained, eunuchs were most often described in terms of negative qualities: ‘This kind of negative definition is regularly applied to groups that lack status in the community. They are defined in terms of what they are not, on a scale established and defined by the dominant group.’⁵¹

This sort of negative definition is typical of sacrificial logic where A understands the other in terms of ‘not A’. However, this sort of language is also characteristic of ‘the strain of apophatic or negative theology’,⁵² the sort of language reserved for angels, Christ or God. This made the idea of the eunuch amenable to being accommodated to the rhetoric of divinisation. And so ‘against nature’ can slip into ‘beyond nature’, and what has been understood in terms of transgression comes increasingly to be understood in terms of transcendence.

In Late Antiquity, eunuchs were often viewed with suspicion, basically because they were considered to have cheated in the struggle to overcome the flesh. After all, if they had never had to struggle against the flesh, how could one be sure that their sanctity was genuine? Attitudes towards eunuchs changed when they began to hold high church offices – around the eighth through to the twelfth centuries, attitudes towards both eunuchs and sanctity underwent a seismic shift.⁵³

The cause of this shift, I suggest, was primarily theological but had significant sociological implications. It is the synthesis of the logic of sacrifice⁵⁴ – with an emphasis on sacrifice as communion – along with the theology of divinisation that brings to birth a uniquely Byzantine worldview. The gendered hierarchy remains and is entrenched, but simple binaries in which the negative is devalued are no longer sustainable. The doctrine of divinisation entails that even the negative term, or the apophatic, is a legitimate path of transcendence, and potential partaker and mediator of the divine.⁵⁵ The term ‘liturgy’ (*leitourgia*) was not simply a religious term but originally denoted a public service. The Divine Liturgy, as the mirror of the cosmic liturgy, was a work of redemption that shed its light upon all of Byzantine society. Just as the church’s liturgy reflected the cosmic liturgy, the imperial court was the mirror of heaven. In sixth-century Byzantine art, we also begin to see angels depicted in the dress of the court eunuch.⁵⁶ Both angels and eunuchs were liminal figures mediating between realms that perhaps ordinary people could not enter. In the famous mosaic of Theodora in San Vitale, Ravenna, we see to her left a eunuch holding open the curtain. Eunuchs, like angels, are mediators and messengers between realms.

Ringrose makes it clear that, in the realm of the imperial court, eunuchs by their liminal status were able to extend and define ‘the charismatic space around the ruler’.⁵⁷ Eunuchs ‘ritually protected the ruler and his or her aura from contamination by ordinary mortals, in practice, creating a distinctively gendered space around the ruler’.⁵⁸ This enabled empresses to transcend their condition as women and occupy the space created for emperors. And unlike other imperial dignitaries, with the exception of the emperors and their consorts, eunuchs ‘received their charge directly from God in a distinctive ceremony’.⁵⁹ Thanks to the sacralising effect of the logic of sacrifice and the doctrine of divinisation, hierarchy was enforced even as everything was recognised as theoretically capable of mediating the divine. But the most astonishing thing about the acceptance of eunuchs, their construction as a third gender, and their identification with angels, is the manner in which they definitively blur the boundaries that the sacrificial logic inscribes.

Conclusion

As we have seen, gender was a problem to be solved in Byzantine society. The valency of gender in Byzantium was ambiguous. It was deeply androcentric, even though this was often invisible to the extent that the masculine was equated with the spirit and hence also with the transcendence of gender. The ideal of the angelic life, even as espoused by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, was at odds with the Christian affirmation of the body which was given doctrinal expression in the incarnation and the resurrection of the body. The reality of gender was the irritating grain of sand in the oyster that kept bringing this tension to painful consciousness. The contradictions were not entirely done away with in Byzantium, but some resolution, it seems, was achieved by bringing the fallen world into contact with the sacred through the mediation of holy women and men, and through the sacrificial liturgy of the Eucharist.

The question of gender was, I suggest, the catalyst that brought about the distinctive Byzantine synthesis of Judeo-Christian and Hellenistic culture. Two emblems of the unique Byzantine synthesis – one visible in art, the other invisible but no less real in the Byzantine psyche – were the angel-eunuch, who was ungendered, and the concept of divinisation as a vehicle for transcending gender. Byzantine theology problematised the idea that becoming is a fall from being and a fall from grace since, for thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, becoming is also the way of divinisation (*theosis*). The particularities of gender, and even of those who

transgressed it, reminded Byzantines that God was concerned for each of them in their individuality and uniqueness. It was their acceptance of every individual's capacity to become godlike, to restore the likeness of God, which meant that an ex-harlot could become a model of sanctity that shamed even the most pious of men, and eunuchs, incomplete men, were accepted as an artistic symbol of the angelic life.

¹ R.F. Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When – And Why?', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 52 (1998): pp. 27–87, at 80; repr. in R.F. Taft, *Divine Liturgies: Human Problems in Byzantium, Armenia, Syria and Palestine* (Aldershot, 2001), I.

² My approach is Weberian, rather than Marxist, in that I hold that ideas and symbols are more important than the material, and shape the construction of a world.

³ This is what Irigaray achieves through her critique of what she terms 'the auto-monocentrism of the western subject', although she does not equate ultimate value with spiritual value, as did Byzantine theologians. L. Irigaray, interviewed by E. Hirsh and G.A. Olsen, "'Je – Luce Irigaray': A Meeting with Luce Irigaray", *Hypatia*, 10.2 (1995): pp. 93–114, at 97.

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione* (PG 46, 145A): Ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ εἶναι πιστεύειν χρὴ τὴν ἀνάστασιν, καὶ μὴ ματαίαν εἶναι; (trans.) C.P. Roth, *The Soul and the Resurrection*, 10, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY, 1993), p. 112.

⁵ Porphyry, *Adversus Christianos*, fragment 77; (ed.) A. von Harnack, in *Abhandlungen der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 1 (Berlin, 1916), p. 93. Cited by J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York, 1983), p. 43.

⁶ See L. Irigaray, *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York, 1991), p. 123.

⁷ I use lower case for 'adam' because 'adam' is not yet a proper name but, as Mieke Bal argues, a common noun, since *hā' ādām*, the adam, signifies 'the earth creature'. M. Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington; Indianapolis, 1987), p. 113.

⁸ D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, 1993), p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38–9.

¹⁰ Philo, *De opificio mundi*, para. 134: ὁ δὲ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα ἰδέα τις ἢ γένος ἢ σφραγίς, νοητός, ἀσώματος, οὐτ' ἄρρεν οὔτε θῆλυ, ἀφθαρτος φύσει, (trans.) F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, *On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses: Philo*, vol. 1, LCL (Harvard, MA; London, 1929), p. 107.

¹¹ Clement, *Stromata* 6.100.3–4, (ed.) O. Stählin and L. Früchtel, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, vol. 2. *Stromata: Buch I–VI*, Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller, 154 (4th edn, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), p. 482; Basil of Caesarea, *Hom. in Ps. 114* (PG 29, 492C); Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 7.23 (PG 35, 785C); Gregory of Nyssa, *De opificio hominis*, 16 and 22, (trans.) J. Laplace, *La Création de l'Homme*, Sources chrétiennes, 6 (rev. edn, Paris, 2011), pp. 154–5 and 184; Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 41 (PG 91, 1309A).

¹² See D. Casey, 'Maximus and Irigaray: Metaphysics and Difference', in W. Mayer, P. Allen and L. Cross (eds), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church: Vol. 4, Liturgy and Life* (Sydney, 2006), pp. 189–98; for a different perspective see D. Costache, 'Living above Gender: Insights from St Maximus the Confessor', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (forthcoming).

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*, 10 (PG 46, 144C–45A); (trans.) Roth, p. 112.

¹⁴ See M. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York, 1991), pp. 53–77.

¹⁵ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10, cited in P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 4.

¹⁶ ‘Maternal love must be crushed underfoot in the name of faith.’ B. Newman, *From Virile Woman to Woman Christ: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia, 1995), p. 81.

¹⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 280, PL 38, 1281: *secundum interiorem hominem, nec masculus, nec femina inveniuntur; ut etiam in his quae sunt feminae corpore, virtus mentis sexum carnis abscondat.*

¹⁸ As Irigaray argues: ‘any theory of the “subject” has always been appropriated by the “masculine”’. L. Irigaray, *Speculum: Of the Other Woman*, (trans.) G.C. Gill (Ithaca, NY, 1985), pp. 133–46.

¹⁹ T. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), p. 8.

²⁰ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.22.3, (eds) A. Rousseau and L. Doutreleau, *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les hérésies, Livre 3*, vol. 2: *Texte et traduction*, Sources chrétiennes, 211 (Paris, 1974), p. 439.

²¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De creatione hominis sermo* 1, (ed.) H. Hörner, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera, supplementum*, 10 (Leiden, 1972): τὸ μὲν τῇ κτίσει ἔχομεν, τὸ δὲ ἐκ προαιρέσεως κατορθούμεν, (trans.) A. Louth with M. Conti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament I. Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL, 2001), p. 33.

²² John Damascene, *Expositio Fidei*, 2.12, (ed.) B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, Patristische Texte und Studien, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1973), cited in Louth, *ibid.*, p. 35.

²³ R. Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis, 1998), p. 25.

²⁴ F.G. McLeod, *The Image of God in the Antiochene Tradition* (Washington, DC, 1999), p. 191.

²⁵ ‘The children of this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are deemed worthy to attain to the coming age and to the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. They can no longer die, for they are like angels; and they are the children of God because they are the ones who will rise’ (Luke 20: 36–8).

²⁶ *Vita sanctae Mariae Egyptiacae* 10, (trans.) Maria Couli, in A.-M. Talbot (ed.), *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, DC, 1996), pp. 65–93, at p. 76. Cf. the bride in Song 1:6.

²⁷ *Vita sanctae Mariae Egyptiacae* 12, (trans.) Couli, p. 77.

²⁸ K.J. Torjesen, ‘Martyrs, Ascetics and Gnostics. Gender-crossing in Early Christianity’, in S.P. Ramet (ed.), *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (New York; London, 1996), p. 86.

²⁹ L. Fatum, ‘Image of God and Glory of Man: Women in Pauline Congregations’, in K.E. Børresen (ed.), *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition* (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 56–137, at 78.

³⁰ *Vita sanctae Eugeniae*, 15 (PL 73, 614C-D), (trans.) J. Anson, ‘The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif’, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 5 (1974): pp. 132, at 22–3. Italics are mine.

³¹ Nicholas Conostas suggest that the original *Vita sanctae Mariae/sancti Marini* was written sometime between the early sixth and mid-seventh century: N. Conostas (trans.), *The Life of St Mary/Marinos*, in Talbot (ed.), *Holy Women of Byzantium*, pp. 1–12, at 2.

³² *The Life of St Mary/Marinos*, 3, (trans.) Conostas, p. 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11, (trans.) Conostas, p. 9.

- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 3.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 3.
- ³⁶ C. Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1992), p. 166.
- ³⁷ *The Life of St Mary/Marinos*, 3, (trans.) Conostas, p. 5.
- ³⁸ M.D. Hart, 'Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage', *Theological Studies*, 51.3 (1990): pp. 450–78.
- ³⁹ Rom. 7:23. See Hart's discussion of Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus orationes* 7 (PG 44, 1289D) in 'Reconciliation of Body and Soul', pp. 475–6.
- ⁴⁰ V.A. Karras, 'A Re-Evaluation of Marriage, Celibacy, and Irony in Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 13.1 (2005): pp. 111–21, at 121.
- ⁴¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* 15.1.2–6 (PG 46, 381B–C): ὅτι οὐχ ἀπλοῦν, ὡς ἂν τις οἰηθείη, τὸ κατόρθωμα τοῦτο ἐστίν, οὐδὲ μέχρι τῶν σωμάτων ἰστάμενον, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πάντα διήκον καὶ διαβαῖνον τῇ ἐπινόῳ, ὅσα κατορθώματα ψυχῆς ἐστί καὶ νομίζεται, (trans.) V. Woods Callahan, *St Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works* (Washington, DC, 1967) p. 51.
- ⁴² Cf. Gregory Nazianzen, *Carmen in laudem virginitatis* 223–77 (PG 37, 539–43).
- ⁴³ R.F. Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium' (as in n.1), p. 75.
- ⁴⁴ Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium', p. 76.
- ⁴⁵ Canon 13. Cited by Taft, *ibid.*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁶ D. Brakke, 'The Problematisation of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 3.4 (1995): pp. 419–60, at 424.
- ⁴⁷ Canon 44, Council of Laodicea, rules that 'women should not enter the sanctuary'. Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium', p. 32.
- ⁴⁸ Canon 11, Council of Laodicea. Cited by Taft, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ V.A. Karras, 'Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church', *Church History*, 73.2 (2004): pp. 272–316, at 310.
- ⁵⁰ Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium', p. 63.
- ⁵¹ K.M. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), p. 40.
- ⁵² Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, p. 41.
- ⁵³ Ibid., pp. 112–13.
- ⁵⁴ See N. Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, Paternity* (Chicago, 1992).
- ⁵⁵ See D. Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).
- ⁵⁶ See A. Brown, 'Painting the Bodiless: Angels and Eunuchs in Byzantine Art and Culture', in A. Cervantes-Carson and D.J. Klein (eds), *Sex and Desire Across Boundaries*. Interdisciplinary.net e-book. URL: <http://interdisciplinary.net/ci/transformations/sexualities/s4/brown%20paper.pdf> (accessed 24.2.12).
- ⁵⁷ Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant*, p. 210.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.

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Index

All index entries shown here correspond to the page numbers within the printed edition only. Within this digital format these page numbers allow for cross referencing only.

Page numbers in bold refer to figures.

abbess(es) 9, 30, 32–33, 39–40, 57, 59, 63, 66, 68, 73, 75, 76; *see also* convent(s)

abbot(s) 19, 22–23, 30, 126, 175; *see also* monasteries

Adam of Usk 147

Aëtius, eunuch 118–19

Agnes of France 137

Alexander of Telese 20

Alexander the Great 26, 155–56, 160, 169

Amatus of Montecassino 15, 18–24, 26–27, 155

Ammianus Marcellinus 95, 111, 158

Anastasius Bibliothecarius 116, 120–21

Andronikos II, emperor 33, 38, 47, 49–51, 54–55, 134, 137

Andronikos Eonopolites, eunuch 164

angel(s) 7, 21, 39, 47, 77, 164, 166, 174, 177, 179, 180–81

Anicia Juliana 4, 64

Anna Comnena 4–5, 9, 37–38, 41, 43, 52–53, 72–73, 76

Anna, saint 78–79

Annales Beneventani 18

Annales Casinenses 21

Annales Laureshamenses 123–24, 126

Annales Regni Francorum 15, 123–24, 127

Annales Veteres Francorum 123–24, 125–26

Anonymus Valesianus 95, 111

Apophthegmata 6, 172

Arabs 23, 65, 101, 115, 119, 130, 155; *see also* Saracen(s)

Aristaenetes 64

army 98, 118–19, 130, 162

Arnulf of Milan 26
 Artemidorus 155, 158, 164
 ascetics/asceticism 3, 6–7, 29, 31, 54, 79, 168, 172, 174–75, 178; *see also* martyrs; saints
 Athanasia, saint 68–69
 Athanasius of Alexandria 63, 79
 Augusta(e) 100–103, 105–106, 129; *see also* basilissa(i)
 Augustine of Hippo 172–73
 Aurelius Victor 107

 barbarian(s) 14–15, 65, 104
 Basil I, emperor 17, 67, 128, 162
 Basil II, emperor 18, 30
 Basil of Caesarea 32, 44, 47, 60, 87, 171, 178
 basileus 128–29
 Basilina 95–96
 basilissa(i) 41, 74, 128–29, 141; *see also* Augusta(e)
 beard(s) 10, 138, 153–66; *see also* hair, tonsures
 Bessarion, abba 6
 Bessarion 141, 147, 150
 bishop(s) 19, 26, 35, 72, 87, 116, 119–20, 126–27, 130, 162, 168, 179
 blinding 114, 117–18, 121, 126, 131
 Bulgaria 33, 119
 Bulgars 130
 Byzantium 1–4, 6, 10–12, 15–17, 19, 25–27, 29–36, 40–41, 43, 47–48, 59–60, 62, 66, 68–69, 73, 77–79, 81, 113–14, 118–19, 123, 125, 127, 129, 134–35, 138, 140, 145, 151, 153–55, 161, 163–67, 174, 176, 178–79, 181
 city of 82, 125, 127, 130, 162; *see also* Constantinople

 Carolingians 9, 14–16, 123
 Cassiodorus 25
 celibacy 143, 177; *see also* marriage
 Charlemagne, emperor 12, 14–16, 25–26, 113–114, 117, 119, 121–128, 153
 Charles the Great: *see* Charlemagne
 childbirth 9, 35, 44, 85, 96–97, 141; *see also* pregnancy
 Christ 8, 37, 79–80, 84–86, 88, 161, 169, 171–72, 174–77, 179
 Christology 79

chronicles 14, 19–22, 17–18, 21, 25, 74, 108, 123, 125–27, 147; *see also* Michael Psellos; Theophanes the Confessor
 Claudia, empress 97, 100
 Claudian 12, 165
 Clement of Alexandria 156–59, 161, 171
 Cleofe Malatesta, empress 5, 9, 133–34, 136–37, 139–51
 coin(s)/coinage 8–9, 23, 25, 27, 37, 99–103, 110–11, 115, 128–29, 137, 154; *see also* money
 consort(s) 94, 128, 180
 Constans II, emperor 154
 Constantia, empress 95–96, 98, 100, 102, 109–10
 Constantine I, emperor 2, 23, 93–112, 95, 96, 116–17, 155–56
 Constantine II 109
 Constantine IV Pogonatus, emperor 154, 162
 Constantine V 128
 Constantine VI, emperor 9, 113–114, 116–121, 126, 128, 130
 Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, emperor 13, 162
 Constantine VIII, emperor 136
 Constantine Gongyles, eunuch 12
 Constantinople 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 21–23, 26, 29–34, 37, 39, 48, 51, 57, 59, 62, 65–66, 68–69, 71–75, 80, 82, 85, 102, 110, 115–17, 122–23, 129–30, 134–35, 137, 139, 141, 143, 155; *see also* Byzantium, city of
 convent(s) 9, 29, 30, 32–46, 48, 50–55, 61, 63, 66, 68, 71, 73–74, 76, 136, 139; *see also* nuns; *typikon/typika*
 Anagyroi 8, 39, 46, 49, 52, 54
 Bebaia Elpis 8, 32–33, 36–37, 39, 41–48, 50–52, 73
 Christ *Philanthropos Soter* 8, 35, 38–40, 45, 75
 Chrysobalanton 68
 Constantine *Lips* 8, 29, 34, 37–40, 42–49, 51–55
 Theotokos Kecharitomene 8, 37–38, 40, 42–43, 45–49, 51–53, 71
 councils, ecumenical 114
 Ephesus I (431) 78–79, 92
 Nicaea II (787) 32, 67, 116, 120, 127, 129
 councils, local 67
 in Trullo 35, 178
 Laodicea 179
 Rome 124–27
 Crispus 95–96, 101, 107–11

crusade(s) 7, 17, 21, 23–24, 73, 155

Cyriacus of Ancona 138

damnatio memoriae 97, 99, 103, 108, 111

death(s) 4, 9, 15, 17, 26, 32–38, 43–44, 48–50, 53, 55, 70, 72, 77, 89–91, 94–99, 102, 104–12, 114–16, 118, 126, 129, 130, 134, 145

Demetrios Pepagomenos 140–146, 148–50

Demetrius of Cydones 147

Dio Chrysostom 156, 159–60

Diocletian, emperor 93, 94, 98–99, 101, 104–06

Doukas 9, 135–38

dreambooks 155, 164

dreams 77, 158, 164

dress 16, 24–25, 27, 31, 54, 106, 133, 137, 140–44, 148, 151, 175, 177, 180; *see also* transvestism

ecclesiarchissa 43, 45–48

education 7, 35, 45, 58–72, 74–76, 134; *see also* literacy

Egeria, nun 4, 63

Einhard 127–28

Eirene, empress 9, 113–31

Eleutherios, palace 120

Elizabeth, saint 32, 69

emperor(s)

Byzantine 8–9, 12–13, 15, 17–18, 22, 25–26, 41, 47, 54, 68, 72, 82, 94–111, 95, 96, 120–21, 123–30, 134, 136–39, 153–55, 158, 164, 179–80

Frankish 9, 113, 119, 121–27

Ottonian 16

Roman 93, 158, 165

empress(es) 1, 4, 9, 29, 33, 37, 39, 40, 51, 55, 57, 65, 70, 93, 95, 96, 98, 100, 103, 106–07, 111, 113–16, 118, 122, 127, 129–31, 134, 137, 139, 141, 180; *see also* *Augusta(e)*; *basilissa(i)*

Ephrem of Syria 85, 91

Epiphanius of Salamis 91

Erchempert 15–16, 20

Eudocia Athenais, empress 65

Eudokia Angelina 51, 55

Eudokia, saint 48–49

Eugenia, saint 175–76

eunuch(s) 1–5, 7, 10, 12, 23, 31, 45, 51, 53, 72, 118, 154–55, 160, 162–67, 174, 179–81

Euphrosyne, empress 1, 115–16

Eusebia, empress 96, 106–107, 109, 111

Eusebius of Caesarea 94, 97, 107–10

Eutropius, eunuch, 12, 165

Eve 8, 80, 84, 86, 90, 118, 157

family/families 4, 8, 29–38, 40–41, 44, 49–53, 55, 59–60, 65, 68–71, 73–75, 93–108, 111, 127, 134, 136, 141, 143–45, 155, 173

Fausta, wife of Constantine I 4, 93, 94, 95, 96, 99–103, 106–12

Febronia, saint 63, 69

femininity 5, 80, 83, 86, 92, 130, 158

Frank(s) 13–14, 16, 25, 117, 121, 123–27, 129

Galeria *see* Valeria

Galerius, emperor 93, 94–95, 97–98, 100–101, 104–07

Geoffrey Malaterra 11, 25–26

George Gemistos 140–41, 146, 148

George Sphrantzes 74, 134, 136

Gisulf II 20–24, 155

Gregory VII, pope 21–22

Gregory Nazianzen 171, 178

Gregory of Nyssa 60–61, 79, 168, 171, 173, 177–78, 181

Gregory Palamas 34, 44

Hadrian, emperor 156

Hadrian I, pope 16, 119–21, 127

hair 2, 6, 10, 16, 27, 99, 102, 133, 135, 137–38, 151, 153–54, 156–62, 165–66, 176; *see also* beards; tonsure(s)

Helena Augusta 4, 93–94, 95, 96, 99–103, 108–10, 116

Heraclius, emperor 115, 161

Heraclius–Constantine, emperor 115

homosexuality 157, 165

hymn(s) 5, 8, 47, 68, 77–85, 86–93

Akathistos 79, 81–82, 84

Hypatia of Alexandria 9, 64, 76

Iakovos, monk 71

icon(s) 9, 49–50, 67, 81, 113–17, 120–22, 127, 129–30
iconoclasm 31, 65–67, 87, 114, 116, 129–30, 179
iconophile(s) 113–17, 127, 130–31
inscription(s) 23, 59, 101–03, 109–10
Irenaeus of Lyon 172
Irene, empress: *see* Eirene
Irene Doukaina, empress 37, 40, 42–44, 46, 48, 49, 51–52, 71
Irene–Eulogia Choumnaina Palaiologina, empress 32, 35, 39, 41–43, 75
Irene Sevastokratorissa 71
Irigaray, L. 6, 167–69, 171–72
Isaac Angelos, emperor 72
Italy 2–3, 7, 9, 75, 137–138, 163
 Southern 7, 11–27, 72, 120

Jacob of Serugh 85, 87
James, L. 1, 3–5, 8
Jerome 59, 64, 108
John VIII, emperor 5, 133, 138
John Chrysostom 44, 61, 89, 91, 108–109, 173, 181
John Damascene 44, 173
John of Ephesus 62
John Skylitzes 12
John Zonaras 53, 108–109, 111
Julian, emperor 82, 95, 96, 107–10, 154–55, 158–59, 161

Kassia, nun 5, 47, 68
kontakion/kontakia *see* hymn(s)
Kythera 60

Lactantius 94, 97, 104–107, 111
laity 24, 40, 51, 116, 178–79
Laonicus Chalcocondyles 9, 134–36, 139
law 2, 3, 29, 72, 139, 166, 177–78
 canon 3
 family 2–3, 88, 99, 111; *see also* marriage
 novellae 128
leitourgia 178, 180; *see also* liturgy/liturgies
Leo III, pope 9, 114, 117, 121–22, 124, 126–28

Leo IV, emperor 9, 113–14, 116
 Leo V, emperor 127, 129
 Leo VI, emperor 17, 30, 48–49, 91, 162
 Lesbos, island 129
 letters 9, 40, 58–60, 64, 65, 69, 70–71, 75, 115, 128, 139, 142–43, 145
Liber Pontificalis 120–122, 162
 life course 2, 10, 153–54, 157, 161–64
 literacy 85, 97; *see also* education
 of women 5, 9, 43, 57–76
 liturgy/liturgies 40, 42–43, 44, 46–47, 53, 55, 68, 74, 85, 91, 116, 162, 167, 178, 180–81; *see also* *leitourgia*
 Liudprand of Cremona 11–12, 16–17, 23, 27
logothete 118, 119, 122
 Lombards 7, 11–16, 19–27, 155
 Lupus Protospatarius 18, 21

 Mantua 137, 139–140, 144
 Manuel Palaiologos, emperor 134
 Manuel II Palaiologos, emperor 9, 133–134, 136, 140, 145, 155
 Marcian, emperor 109
 Marcus Aurelius, emperor 158
 marriage 2, 4, 8–9, 33, 35–36, 41, 44, 53–54, 61–62, 67, 72, 88–89, 96–99, 102, 105–106, 112, 115–16, 122–23, 133–38, 140–44, 145, 150, 161, 165, 167, 171, 174, 177, 178
 Martial 165
 martyrs 10, 73, 119, 171–72, 175, 176; *see also* ascetic(s)/asceticism
 Mary/Marinos, saint 31, 66, 176–77
 Mary, mother of Jesus 1–2, 8, 77–92, 164, 169
 Dormition 85, 91
 Mary of Egypt, saint 172, 174, 176
 masculinity 2, 5, 153–56, 158, 160–61, 166
 Matrona, saint 62–63
 mausoleum 49, 109
 Maximian, emperor 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99, 107, 111
 Maximinus Daza/Daia, emperor 93, 94, 97, 104–106, 111
 Maximus the Confessor 116, 171
 Michael I, emperor 33, 127, 129
 Michael II, emperor 116, 129

Michael III, emperor 123
Michael IV, emperor 33
Michael VII Doukas, emperor 22
Michael VIII Palaiologos, emperor 29, 38–39, 43, 55
Michael IX, emperor 33
Michael Attaleiates 31
Michael Psellos 34–35, 70–71
Mistra 5, 9, 134, 136, 139–41, 143–44, 146, 148, 150
monastery/monasteries 2, 3, 8, 19–20, 29–55, 122, 125, 162, 175–76
 double 8, 32, 35, 39
 estates 31–32, 46, 51, 61
 female: *see* convent(s)
money 7, 50–51, 54, 65; *see also* coin(s)/coinage
monks 14–15, 18–19, 21–22, 30–31, 34, 38–39, 40, 71, 144–45, 150,
 163, 172, 174, 176; *see also* monastery/monasteries
monophysitism 79, 109
Montecassino 14–15, 18–19, 21–22, 26, 155
Morea 140, 147
Musonius Rufus 156–57, 159
Mystras: *see* Mistra

Nikephoros I, emperor 119, 122, 123, 127, 130, 155
Nikephoros II Phokas, emperor 16–18, 33
Norman(s) 7, 11, 15, 18–22, 24–27, 155
Notker 25–26, 128
novels 4, 63–64, 72
nuns 6, 8, 10, 29–54, 59, 62–63, 65, 68–69, 71, 73–76, 140, 142–44,
 176–77; *see also* convents; *typikon/typika*

Ostrogoths 13, 25, 163
Otto I 16–17
Ottonians 11, 16

Paësia, ascetic 7
Paola Malatesta Gonzaga 137, 139–40
patronage 2, 15, 22, 43, 49–50, 71, 73, 75, 137, 147
Paul the Deacon 12–17, 19–20
Pero Tafur 138
Perpetua, martyr 171–72

Peter the Deacon [19](#), [22](#)
Philo of Alexandria [170–71](#)
Philostorgios [108–109](#)
Phokas, emperor [154–55](#), [161](#)
pilgrimage [49](#), [155](#)
Plato [72](#), [119](#), [169](#)
poetry [9](#), [50](#), [57–58](#), [60](#), [61](#), [65](#), [77](#), [92](#), [108](#), [149](#), [151–52](#)
portraits [41](#), [48](#), [50](#), [99–101](#), [103](#), [139](#), [155–56](#)
pregnancy [9](#), [91](#), [145](#); *see also* childbirth
priest(s) [35](#), [38](#), [50](#), [59](#), [108](#), [116](#), [126](#), [130](#), [134](#), [136](#)
priestess [104](#)
princess(es) [9](#), [32–33](#), [35](#), [52–53](#), [72](#), [75](#), [139](#), [140](#), [151](#)
Prisca, wife of Diocletian [4](#), [93](#), [94](#), [103](#), [105](#)
Proba, Faltonia Betitia [64](#)
Procopius [13](#), [163](#)
Psalms [47](#), [57](#), [61–63](#), [67](#), [69–70](#), [73](#), [76](#)
Ps-George Kodinos [137–138](#)
Pulcheria, empress [115](#), [129](#)

Robert Guiscard [18](#), [20](#), [22–25](#), [155](#)
Romanos II, emperor [18](#)
Romanos IV, emperor [22](#), [25](#)
Romanos Melodos [8](#), [77–92](#)
Rome [13](#), [24](#), [58](#), [64](#), [95](#), [97](#), [99](#), [101](#), [102](#), [104–105](#), [119–120](#), [121](#),
[124–26](#), [128–30](#), [139](#), [147](#), [162–63](#), [165](#)

saints [1](#), [9–10](#), [32](#), [34](#), [42](#), [48](#), [49](#), [59](#), [60](#), [62–63](#), [68–69](#), [74–75](#), [114](#),
[126–27](#), [171](#), [174](#); *see also* ascetic(s)/asceticism; martyrs
Salerno [15](#), [19–25](#), [155](#)
Sappho [57](#)
Saracen(s) [17](#), [20–21](#), [26](#); *see also* Arab(s)
Scott, R. [87](#), [106](#)
Sergia, abbess [9](#), [66](#), [76](#)
Sicily [11](#), [20](#), [24](#), [117](#), [120](#)
Sidonius Apollinaris [108](#), [109](#)
Sophia, empress [115](#)
Sophia of Montferrat, empress [5](#), [9](#), [133–39](#), [141](#), [143–44](#)
Sozomen [109](#),
Statius [165](#)

statues [82](#), [99](#), [100](#), [103](#), [149](#), [156](#), [163](#)

Stauracius, eunuch [118](#)

strategos [119](#), [131](#)

Synesius [160–161](#), [163](#)

Syria [2](#), [7](#), [62](#), [85–86](#), [104–105](#), [111](#), [167](#), [178–79](#)

tagmata [130–131](#)

Thekla, saint [47](#), [62](#), [68](#)

themata [119](#)

Theodora, saint [32–33](#), [52](#), [69](#), [73–74](#)

Theodora, wife of Constantius [94](#), [95](#), [98](#), [100](#), [103](#), [109](#)

Theodora I, empress [4](#), [70](#), [111](#), [115](#), [180](#)

Theodora II, empress [1](#), [116](#), [131](#)

Theodora Palaiologina, empress [29](#), [37–40](#), [42–45](#), [47–49](#), [51](#), [53–55](#)

Theodora Raoulaina [41](#), [43](#), [75](#)

Theodora Synadene [4](#), [32–33](#), [36–39](#), [41](#), [45](#), [49–51](#)

Theodore of Stoudios [30](#), [31](#), [35](#), [75](#)

Theodoros II Palaiologos, emperor [133–34](#), [136](#), [139–41](#), [143–45](#), [147](#), [150–52](#)

Theodosia, nun [47](#), [68](#)

Theodosian Code [111](#)

Theoleptos of Philadelphia [40–42](#)

Theophanes the Confessor [75](#), [114–15](#), [117–19](#), [121–22](#), [130](#)

Theotokos [1](#), [8](#), [37–39](#), [44](#), [53](#), [77–85](#), [87](#), [92](#); *see also* Mary, mother of Jesus

Thietmar of Merseburg [25](#)

tonsure(s) [34](#), [52–53](#), [153](#); *see also* beard(s); hair

transvestism [31](#), [175–77](#); *see also* dress

travel [62–63](#), [74](#), [77](#), [115](#), [121](#)

typikon/typika [5](#), [8](#), [29–32](#), [34](#), [36–49](#), [51–54](#), [59](#), [71–74](#); *see also* convents; nuns

Valeria, wife of Galerius [4](#), [93](#), [94](#), [97](#), [100–101](#), [103–106](#), [111–12](#)

Valeria Maximilla [93](#), [94](#), [95](#), [99](#), [101](#)

Virgin Mary: *see* Mary, mother of Jesus; virginity

virginity [8](#), [31](#), [63](#), [66](#), [77–79](#), [81–83](#), [88](#), [91](#), [105](#), [167–69](#), [175](#), [177–78](#)

Willehad, saint [123](#), [126–27](#)

William of Apulia [18](#), [20](#), [24–25](#)

Wipo of Burgundy [25–26](#)

Zonaras [53](#), [108–109](#), [111](#)

Zosimus [82–83](#), [108–109](#), [111](#)